argosy

March

Australia and
New Zealand
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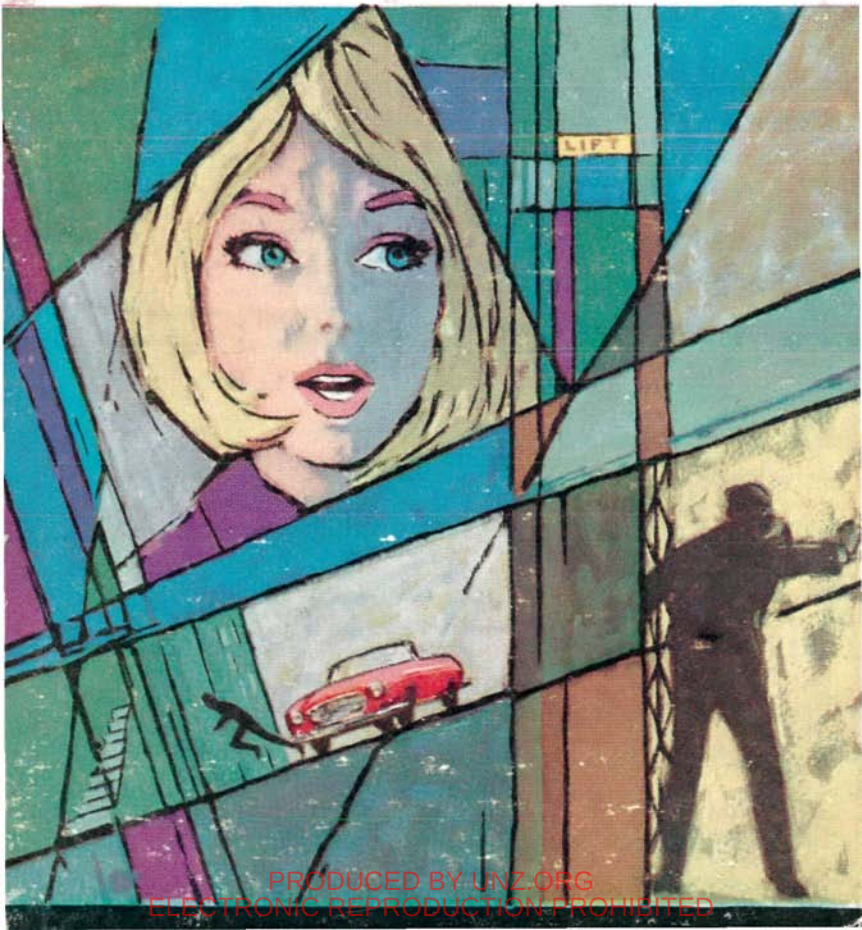
Short stories by **ROBERT GRAVES, TENNESSEE WILLIAMS, B.L.JACOT, E.L.MALPASS, WOLF MANKOWITZ, DAVID LEWIS etc.**



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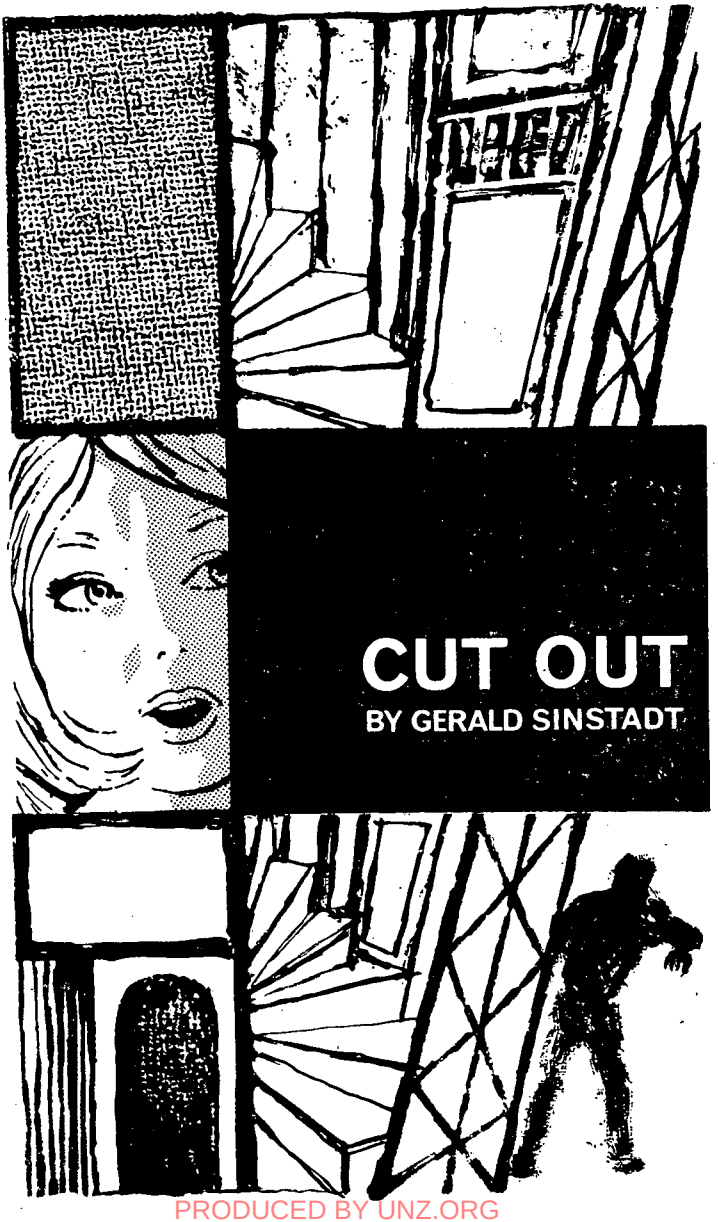

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THE eighteenth passenger to disembark from the London flight emerged from the Customs hall. Kalle Sorensen counted them as a matter of habit, checking the figure he'd been given. This time it wasn't important, but he liked to establish a routine. Then, when he really needed to know, he could ask without someone picking up a phone and saying: "Sorensen was here, sniffing round flight number so-and-so." A small point, but he'd learned to be careful over details.

Sorensen waited patiently. He didn't resent being there merely as a middle man. If life had worked out this way, he must make of it what he could. In fact, he was making a living, and that was something.

A plate-glass door swung, momentarily showing his reflection: tall, grey-haired, fiftyish. His dark, expensive suit was cut to flatter a still slim figure. The empty right sleeve of his jacket was pinned neatly at the elbow. Appearances counted for a lot, he believed. Besides, he claimed a tax allowance for clothes. The door swung again, but there was no sign yet of his man. Then he felt a hand on his left arm.

He turned, parting his lips to show level white teeth in a wide smile of greeting. It was a trick, a mannerism that went with the job. People expected a contact man to be relaxed and assured—so he had learned to put on this smile. It didn't necessarily mean he was pleased.

Now the smile quickly died. It was not the Englishman who had approached him. He knew this man.

"Sorensen," said the man, "I've been looking for you."

The man was thin, narrow-shouldered, with a balding, domed head on a scrawny neck. Above a humourless mouth was a dark moustache which Sorensen suspected was dyed. There was an unengraved gold ring on one of the bony fingers resting on Sorensen's arm. The man's name was Koch.

"I would have rung," said Sorensen. "At five, as usual on Saturdays."

"It wouldn't have been convenient," Koch said. "What are you doing here?"

Sorensen watched the Adam's apple bobbing in the scraggy throat, wondering yet again whether the heavy gutturals came easily. It would prove nothing if Swedish wasn't Koch's native language, but Sorensen believed that all knowledge was worth acquiring. In a sense, he traded in knowledge.

"I'm meeting someone from London," he said, rekindling the smile.

"Someone?"

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"An Englishman called Vigo." It was best to tell him. He wasn't exactly afraid of Koch, but he recognised that working for him involved a certain risk.

"What's he doing here?"

"TV. There's a company making a documentary. Aspects of Swedish life seen by five different Englishmen. Vigo's a sports writer."

"And you?"

"I arrange things—filming facilities, interviews, hotel bookings. That sort of thing."

Koch nodded. "Don't get too involved. Things may need to move fast this weekend. I'm getting worried about the girl. We may have to write her off. Do you know where she'll be?"

"No." Sorensen struggled with his smile, afraid that his face would mirror the panic in his mind. "No, I don't."

"Then find out, and ring me at nine."

Once Koch had issued instructions he was uninterested in further talk. As he walked away, he said: "That's probably Vigo."

A stocky, crew-cropped man in a grey suit was standing near the SAS information desk. He had a light raincoat over one arm and carried a small suitcase. Sorensen, arranging his smile as best he could, went over to him.

"Mr. Vigo? My name is Sorensen, Kalle Sorensen. Welcome to Gothenburg."

The Englishman shook hands firmly, taking Sorensen's left in his own left without embarrassment. "Pleased to meet you. Kalle?"

"It's a diminutive. Karl—Charles; Kalle—Charlie."

"Then I'll call you Charlie," said Vigo, grinning pleasantly. "Where's Mangrel?"

"Taking silent film of the Ullevi stadium. This afternoon we shoot the first of the interviews; the rest tomorrow morning. Afterwards, Mr. Mangrel wants some film of the match, and on Monday we begin another section in Stockholm with a school teacher."

"Never a dull moment," said Vigo. "Who's going to tell me all about Swedish football?"

"I am. You can start to ask questions as we drive to your hotel."

Sorensen had looked forward to this meeting. He remembered Alan Vigo as a player—a skilful, thrusting inside-forward who had played at Stockholm's Räsunda stadium with

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the first British team to visit Sweden after the war. Tickets had been scarce—he recalled paying twenty kronor and thinking it money well spent, especially when Vigo won the game with a jinking dribble and a thunderous shot. Sometimes he wondered if this sort of hero-worship could be a weakness, a symptom of mediocrity. The talented did things while others admired; and the others ended as middle men, piping to someone else's tune.

But now there were more important things. While his voice answered Vigo's questions, his mind was elsewhere, probing the past, a tongue prodding the cavity of an aching tooth.

When he first met Koch, early in the forties, it had seemed like salvation. Hitler's trampling armies had closed Europe's frontiers, preventing the free circulation of the businessmen and tourists upon whom Sorensen, as guide, courier and general agent, depended. It was Koch, edging into a conversation at some Embassy reception, who had pointed out that Sweden's neutrality was nourishing another trade, never entirely quiescent there. Stockholm and the ports of the west coast, he said, had become clearing houses used by intelligence agents of every nationality.

By the end of the evening the thin, humourless man had suggested a solution to Sorensen's financial problems. The work was innocuous enough on the surface—much like what he normally did. A matter, for example, of meeting someone and exchanging sealed envelopes. 'Ordinary courier's business. Except that the meetings were in remote places with people whose names he rarely knew, and that the packages were collected from odd places—the fork of a tree, a broken pipe, under the cistern lid in a public lavatory.

Sorensen never thought of himself as a spy. That was too melodramatic a word. He preferred the jargon phrase he read in newspaper articles: he was a cutout, a means of eliminating direct contact between the network chief and his agents. There were plenty of messengers of that sort, and if he didn't do it someone else would.

Nevertheless, he was glad in 1945 to find his pre-war customers returning. He had always taken pride in giving efficient service, and now it quickly brought as much business as he could deal with single-handed. So he told Koch that he wouldn't be able to help him any more.

Three days later, while he was driving from Gothenburg to Halmstad, he heard a sound like a rifle shot, felt his front tyre

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go, lost control and blacked out as the car hit a wall. The surgeons did a wonderful job, but they failed to save his right arm.

On the first day he returned to work, Koch telephoned. Making no reference to the accident, he gave instructions just as before, the ugly gutturals conveying all the old curt authority.

More jobs followed, but the relationship had changed. No longer preoccupied with self-justification, no longer needing Koch's money, he began to plan his escape—an escape that would have to be final and complete. He opened accounts with banks in Lausanne and London, transferred assets cautiously, and waited.

He was almost ready to go when he met Kiki. She had come with her mother from Copenhagen—an expensive city they could not afford. Her father, whom she spoke of rarely, seemed to have disappeared during the war. Now they lived modestly in a flat on Södra Vägen near the Liseberg amusement park.

Kiki was shorter than many Scandinavian women, but she had their fair hair and wide, blue eyes and unflawed skin. She had personality, too, an eager, youthful directness that was appealing for its complete lack of artifice. She worked as a secretary to one of the directors of SKF, the ball-bearing manufacturers.

Sorensen had met women agents before, but never one as young and engaging as Kiki. At fifty, he suddenly found himself vulnerable. But he was also a realist. Twenty-five years earlier, when he had had two arms and played football and swum and danced, there had been a girl like Kiki. In the end it had come to nothing, and now it was too late. Although, he thought, if he had married he might have had a daughter like Kiki. He was perturbed that she should be involved with Koch, but though there had been opportunities to ask her how it came about, he had never found the courage.

Their first meetings were brief and formal. Then he found himself making chances to telephone her flat; soon they were dining together regularly; when summer came they escaped for occasional idyllic weekends, sailing on calm blue seas; and his thoughts of escape began to seem less pressing.

And now Koch had said: "I'm getting worried about the girl. We may have to write her off."

The afternoon passed swiftly. It was good filming weather,

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and Mangrel, the director, was delighted with the sweeping cantilevered lines of the Ullevi stadium. He cooed happily as the cameraman set up dramatic angles for his shots. Vigo talked at length to Swedish football officials, preparing the ground for his interviews.

When they finished, shortly after seven, Vigo said: "I'm hungry, Charlie. Is there somewhere good where we can eat?"

"Let me make a phone call first," Sorensen said. "Give me five minutes."

Kiki answered immediately. "Kalle," she said, "how nice to hear you. Can you come round for supper?"

"I'd like to, but I have an Englishman to look after. I thought you might care to join us."

He tried to conceal his relief when she accepted. For the moment this solved his problems. He would be able to tell Koch quite truthfully where Kiki was, and in a crowded restaurant she would be safe. And it gave him more time to think.

As they drove out to the Langedrag—a restaurant in a seaside suburb with a splendid prospect of the approaches to Gothenburg—he found Vigo cheerful and optimistic after their day's work. And under the influence of the Englishman's good humour, Sorensen himself was feeling more hopeful, if not exactly confident, by the time Kiki arrived to join them.

"Kalle," she said, holding out her hand for Sorensen to kiss. "Have I kept you waiting?"

Sorensen introduced her to Vigo, who admired her dark-blue, simply-cut dress.

"A compliment from an Englishman, Kiki," said Sorensen. "Didn't I tell you?"

Vigo looked uncomfortable. "So that's why Charlie was so long on the phone—he was talking about me."

Kiki laughed. "Charlie," she said, savouring the word. "If we're going to speak English, I shall call you Uncle Charlie. Do you agree, Alan?"

As Sorensen plainly enjoyed her teasing, Vigo answered: "I'll say this. When he talks about you, it sounds just as though you are his favourite niece."

"He's a not very cunning old fox," the girl said. "The truth is that he thinks it's time a respectable girl of my age was married, so he's busy match-making. Isn't that so, Kalle?"

It might have been true, but Sorensen preferred not to

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examine his motives too closely. He suspected they were sentimental, and sentimentality, like hero-worship, could be a weakness.

The meal was a success, and afterwards, while Vigo and Kiki danced, Sorensen looked on contentedly. He'd learned to manage well enough without his arm, but dancing was one of the things he had to forego. It wasn't fair to a partner. So tonight it was good to take Kiki dancing by proxy.

"Excuse me, sir. A telephone call for you." The waiter's voice, interrupting his thoughts, made him frown, and he got up reluctantly.

When he picked up the receiver in the glass booth, he didn't need to listen to the inflexions of the voice. He'd half expected the call.

"What's going on?" Koch asked.

"Going on?"

"It's five past nine. What's the girl doing there?"

"Dancing."

"With Vigo?"

"You seem to be well informed."

In the ensuing silence he wondered whether his terseness had been interpreted as insolence. He didn't want to provoke Koch.

"You've been seeing too much of her," Koch said suddenly.

In spite of himself, Sorensen laughed. "I'm too old for that. It's only platonic."

"It could be an unnecessary complication."

"What do you suggest then?"

"Nothing. Go home."

"But what about—?"

"I'll deal with the girl myself tomorrow. If you don't want to be involved, go home." The line went dead.

What now? thought Sorensen. He was frightened for Kiki, but he saw that his best chance of helping her would come from first making Koch believe that he had given in. When he returned to the table, Vigo and Kiki were still dancing, so for the moment she was safe. Besides, Koch had said tomorrow.

Sorensen called for his bill, gave a message to the waiter, and left.

Driving away, he submitted to another emotion he despised: anger.

Not long after he eventually fell asleep, still oppressed by the menace of Koch, Sorensen was awakened by the telephone.

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He suddenly realised how relieved he was to hear Kiki's voice.

"Kalle?"

"Yes?" he said, hoping he might find phrases to match her in a Sunday mood.

To his surprise, she was serious. "What made you leave so suddenly last night?"

"I'm sorry. It was a business call."

"At that time?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"It wasn't polite. Alan was your guest."

"You two seemed happy enough. I thought you might prefer to be on your own."

"And that was probably what Alan thought you were up to. It was obvious after that talk of match-making."

"I said nothing about match-making. You brought that up." He found himself arguing with her.

"Well, anyway—" she said, and broke off.

"Anyway what?"

"Oh, nothing. Nothing, nothing, nothing." He heard her slam down the phone.

At the stadium he met a sulky and irritable Mangrel. The fine filming weather had given way to a slate-coloured sky with a threat of rain; one of the officials who had promised to be interviewed had backed out; and an argument had developed about camera positions for filming during the match in the afternoon.

Sorensen began calming, persuading, compromising. This was his profession and he had a reputation at stake. But this morning his own patience—stretched taut by conflicting thoughts of Kiki—was at breaking point.

By two o'clock the crowds were arriving. The noise and movement, the growing volume of car hooters and rattles and bells and voices, set up jangling responses in Sorensen's nerves. He felt guilty when he saw Vigo standing alone watching the cameraman put in a fresh load of film. During the morning they had spoken only briefly. Now Sorensen went over and said: "Would you like a drink, Alan?"

"No, thanks. I've got to lay on a taxi to take me to the airport after the game."

"I'll do that. It's what I'm here for."

"All right." There was no sign of Vigo's friendly grin.

"Alan," said Sorensen, gripping the Englishman's arm, "I'm sorry about last night. Can I talk to you about Kiki?"

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"There's nothing to talk about."

"There isn't time for temperaments, Alan—not if you care about Kiki." He hadn't planned to say this but, unable to save Kiki by himself, he suddenly wanted to conscript Vigo as an ally. "Have you talked to her today?"

"Yes," said Vigo, unexpectedly angry. "Half an hour ago. But she didn't want to know. So go away, Charlie. Stop meddling, and leave me alone!"

Vigo shook his arm free and strode away, leaving Sorensen in the swirling crowd. People surged round him, groups forming, dissolving and reforming. A metallic voice echoed in harsh distortion from loudspeakers. Cheers and counter-cheers broke raucously from under the concrete stands. A Klaxon rasped.

Suddenly, Sorensen turned and ran.

He pushed aside a gate attendant and ran, jostled by hurrying late-comers. Every thud of his feet reverberated in his eardrums. His running, with only one arm, was awkward and ungainly. Several times he stumbled.

He threw himself into his Volvo, slammed the door and started the engine without waiting to regain his breath. As he drove away, for once manipulating clumsily the specially-adapted controls, he heard a cheer signalling the appearance of the teams on the pitch.

Now the time had come he was glad he had planned in such detail. All the documents were in a suitcase behind a panel in the car boot. The route was worked out, criss-crossing Europe. He would leave the car in Hamburg and travel by coach, rail and local buses to Calais, and finally into England with the day trippers. He knew that Koch's employers, if they wanted him badly enough, would be able to track him down eventually. But it would take time, and they might not think it worth while. This, anyway, was his plan. It was too late for second thoughts.

Why then, as he drove south with the rain beginning to fall, did he wonder about Kiki? She had as good as told him not to interfere. Vigo had said it even more plainly. So all right, Kalle Sorensen, get out while you can.

On the outskirts of Gothenburg he stopped at a traffic light. There was a phone box on the corner. Why not just ring Kiki and warn her? She might still be angry and refuse to listen, but at least his conscience would be clear.

Her mother answered. Kiki had gone out to meet the

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Englishman. How did she know? Hadn't she talked to him on the telephone because Kiki wouldn't? He's said he was going to have a look at the tower by the Sjofartsmuseet and perhaps Kiki could meet him at the top. And Kiki had put on her coat and rushed out.

Sorensen ran to his car. It was nearly half-past three. He had no doubt that Alan Vigo was still watching the match at Ullevi. He was equally certain who had made the phone call.

The tower by the Maritime Museum was a memorial to Swedish merchant sailors killed at sea during the Second World War. Everyone knew its tall column which looked out over a fresco of warehouses and crane jibs to the Göta Alv. But on a wet Sunday few people would go up to the observation terrace. A girl's body could fall and become merely another statistic in a country which already had one of Europe's highest suicide rates. Especially a girl who had quarrelled with her English boyfriend. No-one would know of her association with Koch, into whose hand all the cards had so conveniently fallen.

Kiki's car stood outside the Museum. The bonnet was warm to his touch, so she couldn't have been much before him. As he ran to the entrance, he saw the lift doors close and swore to himself. He would have to climb the stairs.

Though he was soon gulping for breath, he forced himself on, three stairs at a time. Once, he lost balance and, with no right arm to steady him, fell against the wall. Frantically, he scrambled to his feet. He was getting slower, but it couldn't be much farther.

He came out into the open to find a gusty wind sweeping harsh flurries of rain into his face. For a second he paused, panting.

He saw Kiki first, with her back to the balustrade. Her coat was open and her dress was soaked by the rain. In her eyes was a look of cold terror. Then Sorensen saw the man.

It wasn't Koch. He should have realised that someone else would be paid to do the dirty work. Koch would be sitting by a phone, waiting to hear that the job had been done.

They were at the back of the deserted platform, away from the lift entrance. Kiki's dishevelled coat suggested that she had just wrenched herself free, but now the man—tall, with broad, powerful shoulders—was closing in again. Sorensen, whose only advantage would be surprise, had to gamble. He did not hesitate but turned at once and sprinted round the platform.

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He came up behind just as the man reached out at Kiki. Now it had to work first time. In a fight he wouldn't stand a chance. Leaping forward, Sorensen hooked his arm round the man's windpipe and kicked at his ankles. They fell together, with Sorensen on top letting his weight go dead. The man grunted and struggled to rise. In desperation, Sorensen threw the weight of his shoulder into his opponent's chest. He saw the man's head hit the floor. Then the man was still.

When Kiki, still shivering, began to question him in the car, Sorensen recounted the conversations he had had with Koch.

She said: "It was my father, Kalle. When he disappeared, we thought he was dead. Then, last year, a letter came from Russia. He was in a camp—he wasn't allowed to say where—but he was alive. We asked the authorities for help, but there was nothing they could do."

"And then Koch turned up?"

"He said that something might be arranged. If I helped him..." She pushed wet hair back from her forehead and drew her coat tighter. "Last week we had a phone call from Germany—someone had smuggled out a letter. Father's dead."

"I'm sorry," said Sorensen.

"Mother felt it most. For me, it meant I could break with Koch."

They drove some way in silence before Kiki asked: "Where are we going?"

"To the airport. Have you got your passport?"

She nodded. "What do you want me to do?"

"Alan Vigo is catching the six o'clock plane. I want you to go with him."

When Kiki protested, Sorensen met every argument. He talked about Koch, about her father, about Vigo; he promised to arrange for her mother to join them; he told her that he would make money available from his English bank. Eventually, she wept, and when he offered his handkerchief she shook her head and rummaged in her handbag. Without speaking, she dried her eyes, combed her damp hair and put lipstick to her mouth. Then she looked at him and smiled faintly. "Bless you, Kalle," she said. "I'll go."

At the airport there was a lot to be done in a short time, and Sorensen, as he moved swiftly among his contacts, had reason to feel that the hours spent establishing himself there had not been wasted. The only remaining doubt in his mind was removed as soon as Vigo arrived. The Englishman listened to

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Sorensen's brief outline of what had happened and nodded sympathetically.

"Kiki will tell you the rest on the plane," Sorensen said, "but now you must hurry or you'll miss the flight."

At the door of the departure hall, they stopped to shake hands.

Kiki said: "What about you, Kalle? You must be sure to come soon, too."

He shook his head. There was no point in running now. After this Koch would have him hunted down wherever he went. Anyway, he didn't want to run now.

A stewardess was urging them to hurry, so he kissed Kiki on the cheek and turned quickly to walk away. He didn't look back, but as he reached his car he heard the roar of the aircraft lifting its silver body off the runway. Watching it rise into a sky of unbroken grey cloud, he raised his hand and waved.

The aircraft dwindled to a black smudge above the horizon, and soon the sky was empty. And Kalle Sorensen, no longer a middle man, got into the car and drove back to his flat to wait for Koch.

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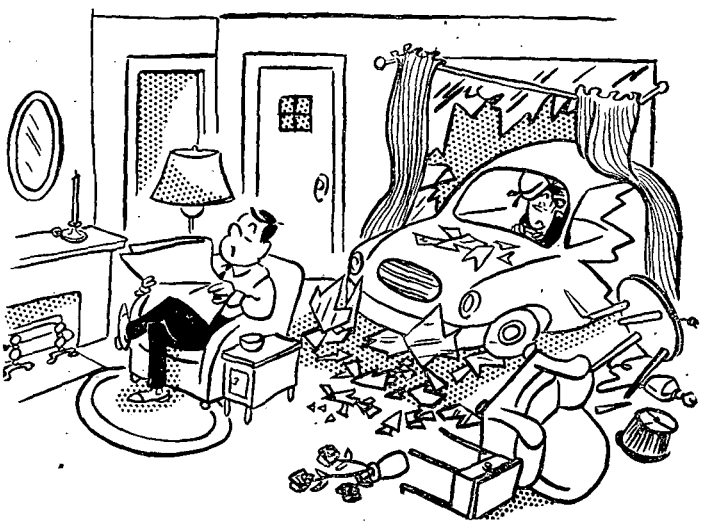

"That you, Gladys?"

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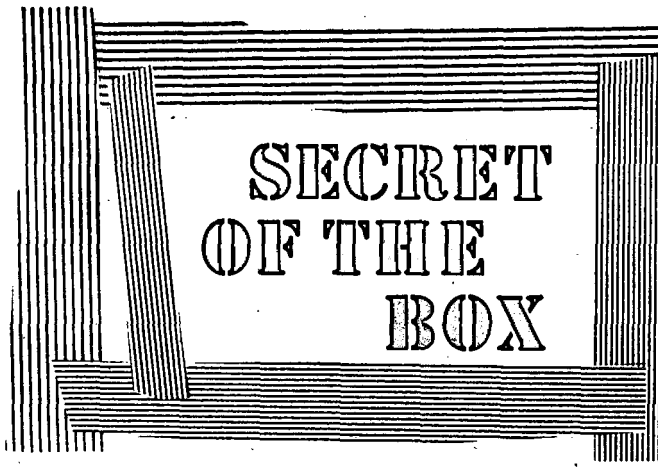

WHEN Lasnov got back from the station, he brought the news that a crate had arrived for Kop. Every day Lasnov met the train from Odessa and tried to make deals with the German soldiers. During the first year he had paid for socks, saccharine, salt, matches and lighter-flints with butter and oil—and had enjoyed the generous profits that are always involved in bartering; later on, the rates had become more established, and there was tough bargaining over this money that kept on decreasing in value as the fortunes of war declined. There was no more butter to trade, and no oil, and for a long time now none of those juicy hunks of bacon for which, here in the Ukraine, you used to be able to get a double-bed mattress that had come from France. Trade had become sharp, sour and exasperating ever since the soldiers had begun to despise their own money. They laughed when Lasnov ran along beside the train with his bundles of money, calling through the open windows in an agitated, sing-song voice, "I pay top prices for everything. Top prices for everything."

Only occasionally did a novice turn up who let himself be talked out of a coat or an undershirt, carried away by the sight of the money. And the days were now few and far between when Lasnov had to negotiate so long over a more valuable article—a pistol, a watch or a telescope—that he was obliged to bribe the stationmaster to keep the train waiting till he had finished his business. In the early days each minute

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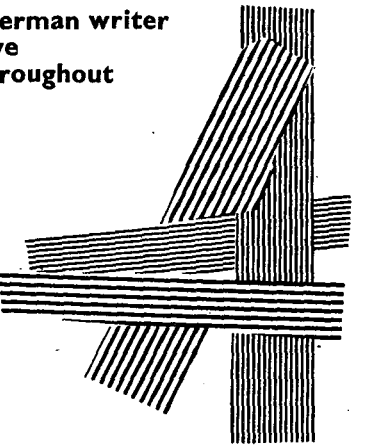

by HEINRICH BÖLL

had cost only a mark, but the greedy stationmaster, a heavy drinker, had long since raised the cost of one minute to six marks.

On this particular morning there had been no business at all. A military policeman paced up and down alongside the waiting train, compared his wristwatch with the stationmaster's pocket watch and snapped at a ragged boy who ran alongside the train looking for cigarette butts.

But the soldiers had stopped throwing away cigarette butts a long time ago; they would carefully scrape off the black ash and hoard their remnants of tobacco like jewels in their tobacco tins; they were no longer generous with bread either, and when the boy could not find any bits of tobacco and ran along the train waving his arms and calling most impressively in a kind of wailing chant, "Bread, bread, bread, comrades!" all he got was a kick from the MP. When the train pulled out he pressed himself against the wall, and a paper bag rolled to his feet. In it were a slice of bread and an apple. The boy grinned as Lasnov passed him on his way to the waiting-room. The waiting-room was empty and cold. Lasnov left the station and stood outside, hesitating. He felt as if the train had yet to arrive; it had been over too quickly, correctly, punctually, but he could hear the rusty creak; the signal arm was slipping back into *Stop*.

Lasnov jumped when someone put a hand on his shoulder. The hand was too light to be the stationmaster's; it was the

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boy's, and he was holding out the apple he had bitten into and mumbling, "It's so sour, this apple—but what'll you give me for this?" He pulled a red toothbrush from his left pocket and held it out to Lasnov.

Lasnov opened his mouth and involuntarily drew his forefinger across his strong teeth, which felt slightly furry. He shut his mouth, took the toothbrush from the boy and studied it. Its red handle was transparent; the bristles were white and firm.

"A nice surprise present for your wife," said the boy. "She has such lovely white teeth."

"You monkey," Lasnov said softly, "what are you doing looking at my wife's teeth?"

"Or for your kids," said the boy. "You can look through it—like this." He took the toothbrush from Lasnov, held it up to his eyes, looked at Lasnov, the station, the trees, the dilapidated sugar refinery, and gave the brush back to him. "You try," he said. "It looks nice."

Lasnov took the brush and held it up to his eyes; on the inside of the handle the images were broken. The station looked like a long, long barn, the trees like broken-off brooms; the boy's face was distorted into a squat grimace; the apple he was holding up to his face looked like a red sponge. Lasnov handed the toothbrush back to the boy. "Yes," he said, "not bad at all."

"Ten," said the boy.

"Two."

"No," whimpered the boy, "no, it's so pretty."

Lasnov turned away.

"Give me five at least."

"All right," said Lasnov, "here's five." He took the toothbrush and gave the boy the money. The boy ran back into the waiting-room, and Lasnov saw him carefully and systematically going through the ashes of the stove with a stick, looking for cigarette butts; a grey cloud of dust rose up, and the boy murmured something to himself which Lasnov was unable to make out.

The stationmaster came up just when Lasnov had decided to roll a cigarette and was checking his tobacco supply in the palm of his hand, separating the dust from the shreds of tobacco.

"Well, now," said the stationmaster, "that looks like enough for two."

He took some, without asking permission, and the two men

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stood smoking at the station corner, looking out into the street, where booths, stalls and dirty tents were being set up. Everything was grey, brown or dirt-coloured; there wasn't a spot of colour even on the children's merry-go-round.

"Someone," said the stationmaster, "once gave my kids some colouring books; on one page you could see the finished pictures, in colour, and on the opposite page the outlines where you had to put in the colours. But I didn't have any paints, or any crayons either, and the kids filled it all in with pencil—I always have to think of that when I look at this market place. I guess they ran out of colours; all they had was pencil—grey, dirty, dark..."

"Yes," said Lasnov, "there's no business at all. The only thing to eat is Rukhev's corn cakes—but you know how he makes those."

"Raw corn cobs, pressed together, I know," said the stationmaster, "then smeared with dark-coloured oil to make you think they've been cooked in oil."

"Well," said Lasnov, "I'll see if I can't do something anyway."

"If you see Kop, tell him a crate has arrived for him."

"A crate? What's in it?"

"I don't know. It's from Odessa. I'll send the boy over to Kop with my handcart. Will you let him know?"

"Sure," said Lasnov.

As he strolled through the square, he kept looking over to the station to see if the boy was coming with the crate. And he told everyone that a crate had come for Kop from Odessa. The news spread quickly through the market, got ahead of Lasnov and, as he slowly approached Kop's stall, came back to him on the other side of the street.

When he reached the children's merry-go-round, the owner was just harnessing the horse. The horse's face was thin and dark, ennobled by hunger; it reminded Lasnov of the nun from Novgorod whom he had once seen as a child. Her face had also been thin and dark, ennobled by abstinence. You could look at her in a dark-green tent at fairs, and it had cost nothing to go in; people were merely asked, when they left the tent, to make a donation.

The merry-go-round owner came up to Lasnov, leaned over and whispered, "Have you heard about the crate that's supposed to have come for Kop?"

"No," said Lasnov.

"They say it's got toys in it, cars you wind up."

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"No," said Lasnov, "I heard it was toothbrushes."

"No, no," said the merry-go-round owner, "toys."

Lasnov stroked the horse's nose affectionately, went wearily on, and thought bitterly of the deals he used to be able to make. He had bought and sold so much clothing that he could have outfitted a whole army, and now he had sunk so low that this kid had talked him into buying a toothbrush. He had sold butter and bacon and barrels of oil, and at Christmas time he had always had a stall with candy canes for the children. The colours of the candy canes had been as piercing as the joys and sufferings of the poor: red like the love that is celebrated in doorways or beside the factory wall; yellow like the flames in a drunken man's brain; or pale green like the pain you felt when you woke up in the morning and looked at the child-like face of your sleeping wife, whose sole protection from life was those frail pink lids, fragile little covers that she had to open as soon as the children began to cry. But in this year of 1944 there weren't even any candy canes, and the children would spend Christmas sitting at home, sipping thin soup and taking turns looking through the handle of the toothbrush.

Next to the merry-go-round a woman had put two old chairs side by side and opened a shop on them. She had two mattresses to sell, with the words *Magasin du Louvre* still visible on them, a well-thumbed book entitled *Left and Right of the Railway Line—From Gelsenkirchen to Essen,* an English magazine dating from 1938, and a little tin which had once contained a typewriter ribbon.

"Some lovely things," said the old woman, when Lasnov stopped beside her.

"Very nice," he said, and was about to move on when the woman pounced on him, plucking him by the sleeve, and whispered, "A crate has come for Kop from Odessa. With all sorts of things in it."

"Has it?" he said. "What things?"

"Sweets, all coloured, and rubber animals that squeak. It's going to be such fun."

"Sure," said Lasnov, "it's going to be fun."

When he finally reached Kop's stall, Kop had just begun to unload his regular merchandise and spread it out: pokers, saucepans, stoves, rusty nails that he had hammered straight. Nearly everyone had gathered around Kop's stall; they stood there speechless with excitement, looking along the street. As Lasnov went up to him, Kop was just unpacking a fire guard.

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"I've got a message for you," said Lasnov. "A crate has arrived for you. The boy who's always hanging around the station is going to bring it over."

Kop looked at him with a sigh and said quietly, "Now I'm getting it from you too."

"What d'you mean, me too?" said Lasnov. "I've come straight here from the station to give you the message."

Kop ducked nervously. He was well dressed and wore an immaculate grey fur cap; he always carried a stick with which he made dents in the ground as he walked along; and as a sole reminder of his better days he kept a cigarette dangling nonchalantly from his lips, a cigarette that was rarely alight because he rarely had money for tobacco.

Twenty-seven years ago, when Lasnov had come back to the village as a deserter with the news of the Revolution, Kop had been a young officer in command of the railway station, and when Lasnov had entered the station at the head of the Soldiers' Council to arrest him, Kop had been prepared to allow a movement of his lips, the angle of his cigarette, to cost him his life; in any case, they had all looked at the corner of his mouth, and he had realised they might shoot him, but he had not removed the cigarette from his lips when Lasnov approached him. However, Lasnov had merely slapped his face; the cigarette had fallen out of his mouth, and without it he looked like a boy who had forgotten his homework. They had left him in peace. First he had been a teacher, then a merchant; but still, whenever he saw Lasnov, he was afraid Lasnov would knock the cigarette out of his mouth.

He raised his head apprehensively, straightened the fire guard, and said, "If you only knew how many people have told me that already."

"A fire guard," said a woman. "If only one had enough heat to shield oneself from it with a fire guard!"

Kop looked at her contemptuously. "You have no sense of beauty."

"No," said the woman, with a laugh, "I'm beautiful myself, and look at all the nice children I've got." She ran her hand lightly over the heads of the four children grouped around her. "You don't—" She looked up, alarmed, as her children suddenly ran off towards the station, following the other children, towards the boy who was bringing Kop's crate on the stationmaster's handcart.

Everyone hurried away from the stalls; the children jumped down off the merry-go-round.

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"My God," whispered Kop to Lasnov, the only one who had stayed behind, "I could almost wish the crate hadn't come. They'll tear me to pieces."

"Don't you know what's in it?"

"No idea," said Kop. "I only know it must be made of tin."

"There's a lot of things can be made of tin—cans, toys, spoons."

"Music boxes—the kind you turn with a handle."

"Yes—just imagine."

Kop and Lasnov helped the boy lift the crate down off the cart. The crate was white, made of fresh, smooth boards, and it was nearly as high as the table on which Kop has spread out his rusty nails, pokers and scissors.

Everyone fell silent as Kop thrust an old poker under the lid of the crate and slowly raised it up; you could hear the faint creak of the nails. Lasnov wondered where all the people had suddenly sprung from. He was startled when the boy suddenly said, "I know what's inside."

No-one asked what. They all looked at him in suspense, and the boy looked silently at the tense faces; he broke out in a sweat and said in a low voice, "Nothing—there's nothing inside."

If he had said that one second earlier, they would have fallen on him and beaten him up in their disappointment, but now Kop had just taken the lid off and was groping around in the shavings. He removed a whole layer of shavings, then another, then crumpled paper—then he held up both hands filled with the things he had found in the centre of the crate.

"Tweezers," a woman cried out, but they weren't.

"No," said the woman who had called herself beautiful, "no, they're—"

"What are they?" said a little boy.

"Sugar tongs, that's what they are," said the merry-go-round owner, in a dry voice; then he suddenly let out a wild laugh, threw up his arms, and ran back to his merry-go-round, still roaring with laughter.

"So they are," said Kop. "They're sugar tongs—dozens of them." He threw the tongs he was holding back into the crate and groped around in it, but although they could not see his face, they all knew he was not smiling. He ran his hands through the clinking metal tongs, the way misers in paintings finger their treasures.

"Isn't that just like them?" said one woman. "Sugar

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tongs! I really believe if there was such a thing as sugar I could manage to pick it up in my fingers, eh?"

"I had a grandmother," said Lasnov, "who always picked sugar up in her fingers—but then she was a dirty peasant woman."

"I think I could bring myself to do that, too."

"You always were a pig anyhow, picking sugar up in your fingers. Ugh."

"You could use them," said Lasnov, "to fish tomatoes out of jars."

"Provided you had any tomatoes," said the woman who had called herself beautiful.

Lasnov looked at her closely. She really was beautiful; she had plentiful fair hair, a straight nose, and fine, dark eyes.

"You could also use them," said Lasnov, "for pickles."

"If you had any," said the woman.

"You could use them to pinch yourself in the behind."

"If you still had one," said the woman coldly. Her expression was becoming more and more angry and beautiful.

"You could pick up coal with them, too."

"If you had any."

"You could use them as a cigarette-holder."

"If you had anything to smoke."

Whenever Lasnov spoke, they all turned towards him, and as soon as he had finished they all turned towards the woman; the more ridiculous the sugar tongs became in this dialogue, the more empty and miserable became the faces of the children and their parents.

I must make them laugh, thought Lasnov; I was afraid there would be toothbrushes in the crate, but sugar tongs are really even worse. He blushed under the woman's triumphant gaze and said loudly, "You could use them to serve boiled fish."

"If you had any," said the woman.

"The children could play with them," said Lasnov, in a low voice.

"If you—" began the woman; then suddenly laughed out loud, and everyone else laughed too, for children were something they all had plenty of.

"All right," said Lasnov to Kop, "I'll take three. How much are they?"

"Twelve," said Kop.

"Twelve," said Lasnov, and threw the money down on Kop's table. "It's a real bargain."

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"It's really not expensive," said Kop, shyly.

Ten minutes later all the children were running about the square with their sugar tongs glittering like silver; they sat on the merry-go-round, pinched their noses with them, brandished them in front of the grown-ups.

The boy who had brought the crate over had been given a pair, too. He sat on the steps in front of the station and hammered his sugar tongs flat.

Now at last, he thought, I've got something I can use to get in between the cracks of the floor boards. He had tried with pokers, scissors, and bits of wire, but he had never been able to manage it. He was sure he would be able to, now that he had this tool.

Kop counted his money, stacked it, and placed it carefully in his wallet. He looked at Lasnov, who was standing beside him, gloomily watching the activity in the square.

"You could do me a favour," said Kop.

"What favour?" said Lasnov, absentmindedly, without looking at Kop.

"Slap my face," said Kop, "hard enough for the cigarette to fall out."

Lasnov, still without looking at Kop, shook his head thoughtfully.

"Do that," said Kop, "please do. Don't you remember?"

"I remember," said Lasnov, "but I don't feel like doing it again."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," said Lasnov, "I'm sure. I've never thought of doing it again."

"Damn it," said Kop; "here I've been dreading it for twenty-seven years."

"You didn't have to," said Lasnov.

He walked back to the station, shaking his head. There's still a chance, he thought, that they'll run a special, a leave train or a train of wounded; specials didn't come very often, but just the same there might still be one today. He thoughtfully fingered the toothbrush and the three sugar tongs in his coat pocket.

There have been times, he thought, when three special trains have arrived in one day.

He leaned against the lamp post in front of the station and scraped the last of his tobacco into a little heap.

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ROBERT GRAVES

Treacle Tart

THE news travelled from group to group along the platform of Victoria Station, impressing our parents and kid-sisters almost as much as ourselves. A lord was coming to our prep school. A real lord. A new boy, only eight years old. Youngest son of the Duke of Downshire. A new boy, yet a lord. Lord Julius Bloodstock. Some name! Crikey!

Excitement strong enough to check the rebellious tears of home-lovers, and make our last goodbyes all but casual. None of us having had any contact with the peerage, it was argued by some, as we settled in our reserved Pullman carriage, that on the analogy of policemen there couldn't be boy-lords. However, Mr. Lees, the Latin Master, (declined: *Lees, Lees, Lem, Lei, Lei, Lee*) confirmed the report. The lord was being driven to school that morning in the ducal Rolls-Royce. Crikey, again! *Cricko, Crickere, Crikey, Crictum!*

Should we be expected to call him "Your Grace," or "Sire," or something? Would he keep a coronet in his tuck-box? Would the masters dare cane him if he broke school rules or didn't know his prep?

Billington Secundus told us that his father (the famous QC) had called Thos a "tuft-hunting toad-eater," as meaning that he was awfully proud of knowing important people, such as bishops and QCs and lords. To this Mr. Lees turned a deaf ear, though making ready to crack down on any further disrespectful remarks about the Rev. Thomas Pearce, our Headmaster. None came. Most of us were scared stiff of Thos; besides, everyone but Billington Secundus considered pride in knowing important people an innocent enough emotion.

Presently Mr. Lees folded his newspaper and said: "Bloodstock, as you will learn to call him, is a perfectly normal little

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chap, though he happens to have been born into the purple—if anyone present catches the allusion. Accord him neither kisses nor cuffs (*nec oscula, nec verbera,* both neuter) and all will be well. By the way, this is to be his first experience of school life. The Duke has hitherto kept him at the Castle under private tutors."

At the Castle, under private tutors! Crikey! *Crikey, Crikius, Crikissime!*

We arrived at The Cedars just in time for school dinner. Thos, rather self-consciously, led a small, pale, fair-haired boy into the dining hall, and showed him his seat at the end of the table among the other nine newcomers. "This is Lord Julius Bloodstock, boys," he boomed. "You will just call him Bloodstock. No titles or other honorifics here."

"Then I prefer to be called Julius." His first memorable words.

"We happen to use only surnames at Brown Friars," chuckled Thos; then he said grace.

None of Julius' table-mates called him anything at all, to begin with—being either too miserable or too shy even to say "Pass the salt, please." But after the soup, and halfway through the shepherd's pie (for once not made of left-overs) Billington Tertius, to win a bet, leaned boldly across the table and asked: "Lord, why didn't you come by train, same as the rest of us?"

Julius did not answer at first, but when his neighbours nudged him, he said: "The name is Julius, and my father was afraid of finding newspaper photographers on the platform. They can be such a nuisance. Two of them were waiting for us at the school gates, and my father sent the chauffeur to smash both their cameras."

This information had hardly sunk in before the third course appeared: treacle tart. Today was Monday: onion soup, shepherd's pie and carrots, treacle tart. Always had been. Even when Mr. Lees-Lees-Lem had been a boy here and won top scholarship to Winchester.

"Treacle. From the Greek *theriake,* though the Greeks did not, of course..." With this, Mr. Lees, who sat at the very end of the table religiously eating treacle tart, looked up to see whether anyone were listening; and noticed that Julius had pushed away his plate, leaving the oblong of tough burnt pastry untouched. "Eat it, boy!" said Mr. Lees. "Not allowed to leave anything here for Mr. Good Manners. School rule."

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"I never eat treacle tart," explained Julius with a little sigh.

"You are expected to address me as 'Sir,'" said Mr. Lees.

Julius seemed surprised. "I thought we didn't use titles here, or other honorifics," he said, "but only surnames."

"Call me 'Sir,'" insisted Mr. Lees, not quite certain whether this were innocence or impertinence.

"Sir," said Julius, shrugging faintly.

"Eat your tart," snapped Mr. Lees.

"But I never eat treacle tart—sir!"

"It's my duty to see that you do so, every Monday."

Julius smiled. "What a queer duty!" he said incredulously.

Titters, cranings of necks. Then Thos called jovially down the table: "Well, Lees, what's the news from your end? Are the summer holidays reported to have been wearisomely long?"

"No, Headmaster. But I cannot persuade an impertinent boy to sample our traditional treacle tart."

"Send him up here," said Thos in his most portentous voice. "Send him up here, plate and all! Oliver Twist asking for less, eh?"

When Thos recognised Julius, his face changed and he swallowed a couple of times, but having apparently lectured the staff on making not the least difference between duke's son and shopkeeper's son, he had to put his foot down. "My dear boy," he said, "let me see you eat that excellent piece of food without further demur; and no nonsense."

"I never eat treacle tart, Headmaster."

Thos started as though he had been struck in the face. He said slowly: "You mean perhaps: 'I have lost my appetite, sir.' Very well, but your appetite will return at supper-time, you mark my words—and so will the treacle tart."

The sycophantic laughter which greeted this prime Thossism surprised Julius but did not shake his poise. Walking to the buttery-table he laid down the plate, turned on his heel, and walked calmly back to his seat.

Thos at once rose and said grace in a challenging voice.

"Cocky ass, I'd like to punch his lordly head for him," growled Billington Secundus later that afternoon.

"You'd have to punch mine first," I said. "He's a . . . the thing we did in Gray's *Elegy*—a village Hampden. Standing up to Lees and Thos in mute inglorious protest against that foul treacle tart."

"You're a tuft-hunting toad-eater."

"I may be. But I'd rather eat toads than Thos' treacle tart."

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A bell rang for supper, or high tea. The rule was that tuck-box cakes were put under Matron's charge and distributed among all fifty of us while they lasted. Democracy, Thos called it (I can't think why); and the Matron, to cheer up the always dismal first evening, had set the largest cake she could find on the table: Julius'. Straight from the ducal kitchens, plastered with crystallised fruit, sugar icing and marzipan, stuffed with raisins, cherries and nuts.

"You will get your slice, my dear, when you have eaten your treacle tart," Matron gently reminded Julius. "*Noblesse oblige.*"

"I never eat treacle tart, Matron."

It must have been hard for him to see his cake devoured by strangers before his eyes, but he made no protest; just sipped a little tea and went supperless to bed. In the dormitory he told a ghost story, which is still, I hear, current in the school after all these years: about a Mr. Gracie (why Gracie?) who heard hollow groans in the night, rose to investigate and was grasped from behind by an invisible hand. He found that his braces had caught on the door knob; and, after other harrowing adventures, traced the groans to the bathroom, where Mrs. Gracie . . .

Lights out! Sleep. Bells for getting up; for prayers; for breakfast.

"I never eat treacle tart." So Julius had no breakfast, but we pocketed slices of bread and potted meat (Tuesday) to slip him in the playground afterwards. The school porter intervened. His orders were to see that the young gentleman had no food given him.

Bell: Latin. Bell: Maths. Bell: long break. Bell: Scripture. Bell: wash hands for dinner.

"I never eat treacle tart," said Julius, as a sort of response to Thos' grace; and this time fainted.

Thos sent a long urgent telegram to the Duke, explaining his predicament: school rule, discipline, couldn't make exceptions, and so forth.

The Duke wired back non-committally: QUITE SO STOP THE LAD NEVER EATS TREACLE TART STOP REGARDS DOWNSHIRE.

Matron took Julius to the sickroom, where he was allowed milk and soup, but no solid food unless he chose to call for treacle tart.

He remained firm and polite until the end, which came two days later, after a further exchange of telegrams.

We were playing kick-about near the Master's Wing, when

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the Rolls-Royce pulled up. Presently Julius, in overcoat and bowler hat, descended the front steps, followed by the school porter carrying his tuck-box, football boots and hand-bag. Billington Secundus, now converted to the popular view, led our three cheers, which Julius acknowledged with a gracious tilt of his bowler. The car purred off; and thereupon, in token of our admiration for Julius, we all swore to strike against treacle tart the very next Monday, and none of us eat a single morsel, even if we liked it, which some of us did!

When it came to the point, of course, the boys sitting close to Thos took fright and ratted, one after the other. Even Billington Secundus and I, not being peers' sons or even village Hampdens, regretfully conformed.

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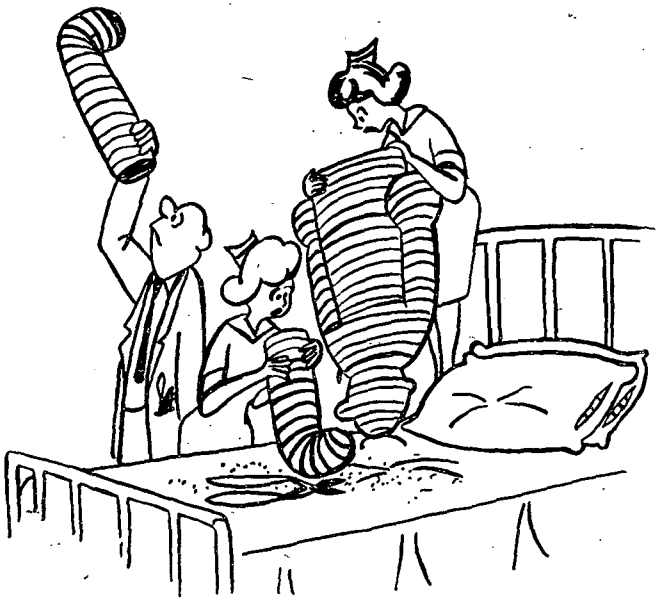

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A man who has won real-life fame by sailing the seas single-handed, sends Argosy a story of the Pacific islands

To Yonder Island

BY DAVID LEWIS

THE name Tuamotu means just this—" the islands yonder." They are really atolls, coral circlets round lagoons, some of which are a mile across, others thirty. There are around eighty of them scattered across a thousand miles of South Pacific. As you look at a map, to the west of the archipelago lies Tahiti, while to the eastward the south-east trade wind booms unhindered across four thousand miles of empty ocean. This, then, is a tale of the Tuamotus.

The Pacific Islands Pilot, Vol, 111, lists many *vigias* or unconfirmed dangers to navigation. Shoals of leaping bonito may have been responsible for some accounts of broken water, or volcanic islands that appear overnight swaddled in hissing steam only to sink again, like Falcon Island off Tonga, or Tuanaki, south of the Cooks. Then, of course, the old whaling skippers who described most of them were notoriously careless in their navigation. Diligent search was made for *vigias* during the war, since when most that remain unconfirmed can safely be treated with scepticism.

But Viking Reef (" Reported by whaler *Viking* of Nantucket, 1854; searched for, unsuccessfully, by *HMS Cygnet,* 1898.") lies far off shipping lanes in the vastness east of the Tuamotus, and it exists all right—razor-edged, a bare fathom beneath the surface. It was rediscovered by the steel-hulled, inter-island trader *Tiare Motu* one night, as she ran blind through the black heart of a tropical squall. Her momentum carried her over and her engine was still turning fifty-five seconds later, when, with her bottom sliced open, she slid under towards the sea bed half a mile down. All aboard went with her—that is everyone of any importance—for the two left

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above the surface, a boy little more than a baby and his grandfather, could scarcely be considered a viable pair and would soon be gone, too.

Had the *Tiare Motu* not been a slovenly ship, her square-sterned gig would not have been cluttered up with the mate's empty bottles; moreover, it would have been properly secured on deck. Nor would those two have been permitted to sleep in a ship's boat. However, the officers were not very interested in the old man and his grandson. After forty years in trading-ketches and fishing canoes, the grizzled seaman's affliction had put an end to his seagoing—and to any other useful pursuit for that matter. Truth to tell the officers considered him dirty, which he was not, in spite of his handicap; and ignorant, which is debatable; and poor, unsuccessful and a native, all of which were beyond dispute.

The squall did not wake the old sailor, but the violent wrench and the deluge of salt water as the gig jerked free of the sinking steamer and was left pitching and rolling wildly on the surface, brought him abruptly to consciousness. Still, it was some time before the quick bobbing of the small boat in the sharp sea kicked up by the brief storm and the tearful words of his grandson—who, after all, was very young so could tell him but little—brought him some realisation of their position.

The factors in the equation were easily enough comprehended. They were adrift in a sixteen-foot boat that was no doubt leaky, with a pair of oars, an unstepped mast, a lug sail—probably rotten—and sundry empty bottles and cans. There was no food or water, nor were there charts or compass. Not that the former would have been much use to them, for no chart was needed to tell a seaman that the nearest islands in the Tuamotu archipelago lay over seven hundred miles to the west of where the *Tiare Motu* had gone down. So the man solved his equation and the answer was death.

He began to cry with the weak, facile tears of the aged for the approaching end of his own unremarkable life, and of the child's, which had been too brief ever to attain importance; and for the thirst and the pains of hunger they would presently suffer before the end. He prayed that it might come quickly. Such being the nature of man, however, he then bailed the boat with a tin can that had been washing against his shins. Afterwards, he wrapped the boy in the sail, where he sobbed and slept intermittently until morning.

When the sun rose blazing in the eastern horizon, the man

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awoke from a fitful doze to full realisation; he prayed again to die soon. Almost at once, it seemed, the warmth of the sun was cut off and the very heavens opened as torrential rain streamed down. Was this his prayers' answer—the rain? If it was, what could Jesus, or perhaps it was Tangaroa, mean? After all Jesus, like Tangaroa, had been a fisherman. Certainly both were practical seamen who would well understand this situation. So what were they asking of him?

Now he began to feel abashed. He had a perfectly sound boat, or at least one that floated; yet in his panic he had had the effrontery to petition the Divine Sea Fisherman and the ancient sea god of the Pacific that he should die! Truly he was ashamed; was he not a descendant of the old sea heroes too? Yes, of gods even, for his father had recited his ancestry back to their forebear Maui—Maui who had fished up whole islands through the roaring surf to make the dry land.

"*Mokopuna*, Grandfather, the rain is so cold," the boy whimpered.

"Then we must use it. Help me, *E Tupuna*, Grandson; open up the sail and stretch it between the thwarts. Now bring the tin bailer, the bottles and the empty cans."

They were not rigging a shelter, but a catchment for rain. The cascading water drained off the canvas into the containers, filling them before the tropical thunderstorm passed by. When the rain stopped, the man propped up the bottles and tins. The atolls began a mere seven hundred and fifty miles to the west, he told himself, downwind if the Trades blew true—and he, a Polynesian seaman, direct descendant of the semi-divine Maui, had not even considered the obvious course he must pursue!

He stood up now, clutching the gunwale, a wild gaunt figure, his clothes flying about him as he prayed again, this time aloud and more as befitted a man: "O Lord Jesus, O Tangaroa *i te tata*—in the immensity of space—hold steady your south-east wind; guide the bow of my canoe."

The little boy had been watching in awed wonder. "What are we going to do, *E Mokopuna*?"

"Why, Tamaiti, we have a good little ship, a sail, a steering oar and water to drink, why let us proceed to the islands!"

Then he stepped the mast, hoisted and sheeted in the lug sail, picked up an oar and, seating himself in the stern sheers, he set course to the westward. And should this last be considered a little impractical in a boat without a compass—why not at all! He had only to keep the warmth of the still

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rising sun on the right side of his neck and ear, the trade wind glancing off his left cheek, and let the long swell come surging up under the port quarter.

All day the swell lifted rhythmically, while the sun worked round until it shone full on to the right side of his forehead; then it was gone, but through the warm night the wind and swell remained steady. Should the Trades be disturbed by variable winds setting in for a day or two, as is usual in these latitudes, they would have to lower sail and wait: in the South Pacific temporary interruptions in the trade winds are commonly accompanied by thunderstorms and these bring rain—he would no longer be able to direct their course.

Three times during the first week flying-fish hit the sail in the night and tumbled, whirring and flapping, into the boat. In the morning the boy searched them out and gave them to the man, who scaled them with his worn sheath knife and sliced off thin raw fillets that he and the boy chewed hungrily. Once, during a calm, his grandson called out excitedly that he could see fish swimming round the boat, so he laboriously extracted a loose nail and bent it to form a fish hook, which he baited with a piece torn from his shirt. That day they feasted on raw fish to repletion, and what was over he cut into strips to dry in the sun.

Early in the second week it rained again—and none too soon. There were a few more flying-fish, some floating seaweed and once, a lucky swipe with an oar bowled over an inquisitive booby bird that had incautiously perched, squawking, on the bow.

The man told long, rambling tales of the ancient sea heroes, to which the boy would listen, though he understood but little. All the same, he was enthralled as he lay curled up in the stern sheets. He pictured the seventy-foot double canoes with their streaming feather penants setting their claw sails to the scream of the conch-shell trumpets and the thunder of the drums, to sail over seas of magic romance. It did not once occur to him or his grandfather that they were living a saga as forlorn and gallant as the most heroic legend of yesterday.

But as the days passed, in spite of all the flying-fish they became steadily weaker, and the third week found them very feeble indeed. The child had become listless—he was no longer interested in the old man's stories, his vitality had begun to ebb fast. Though gaunt now, almost spectral, the man's energy was less impaired, but he realised full well what

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the boy's apathy implied. What made it worse was that the islands could not be far off now; already the signs were becoming apparent to one who could read them.

The previous evening, frigate-birds had wheeled over them for a while; then their harsh cries had receded towards the sunset. Now, the frigate-bird cannot rest long on the sea, since his feathers quickly become water-logged, so at nightfall he always returns to land—usually no more than seventy miles off. The little boy, who had been roused by the noise of the seabirds, had rambled on about a tiny magic canoe with a purple sail. His grandfather questioned him gently and, trailing his hand over the side, decided that the water had become warm enough to suit the gaudy-crested Portuguese man-of-war. As any seaman knows, the last trace of the cold Humboldt current that upwells off the South American coast is lost close eastward of the Tuamotus, and only west of this point does the sea reach a temperature suitable for the big jelly-fish.

From now on, the old sailor reflected, he must listen carefully for the muffled thunder of surf on barrier reefs. As the reef passes are usually on the north-west side—that is, opposite to where the prevailing-wind-driven combers come roaring in against the land—if they should come upon one of the atolls sprinkled through this archipelago, they must cautiously circle the north side, then come about and head in close-hauled.

There was another indication of land. Even a ring of coral five miles in diameter deflects the ocean swells, bending their axes until on every side of the island they form into ranks parallel to the coastline before they come driving ashore. Many miles at sea—ten miles from the mast of a fishing canoe—far beyond the sight range of coconut palms on a low atoll, experienced Polynesian fishermen can detect and interpret this refraction of the big rollers. Such a change was now apparent by the boat's motion.

Land could not be so many miles away. But where did it lie? Ahead, right or left—or could it already be behind them? Night had fallen, and though this did not usually bother the old man, he had by now placed some hopes in their being sighted by fishing canoes or from ashore—but at night they would be invisible. The boy's whimpering was very feeble now; it was clear that he could not last much longer without food. The man too, was very weak. His ears kept ringing with the voices of his ancestors, chiding him because he had been so afraid and now was failing in the face of the ocean.

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When the newly-risen sun again warmed him, the man wept a little in his frustration. His eyes were watering; he blew his nose noisily over the side but they continued to stream; he sneezed. Oh this absurd malady! All his life the finest particles of vegetable matter, even miles away, would set his nose and eyes running.

Vegetation! Now he could detect the scent of *tiare* carried down on the wind from the south-east. They must have passed north of an atoll in the night and be downwind of it now. Clumsily, he hurried to haul in the sheet and bent his frail strength against the steering oar. The gig swung slowly round and lay over on the wind.

The heeling of the boat wakened the little boy, who sat up and looked about him. "Are we going to land?" he asked. "I like it in the boat but I would like to play in the sand for a while."

The man scarcely heard him, for he was concentrating on the dull boom of surf that was now audible. "Tell me, Tamaiti," he called urgently, "do you see a reef pass?"

"What is that?" the boy asked, and the old man groaned with helplessness.

"Perhaps the men in that canoe will know," suggested the boy helpfully. "Oh *Mokopuna*, why are you crying?"

As the fishing canoe drew near, the rhythm of its paddles slowed.

"See that one, he is *Aku-Aku*, a ghost of our fathers," cried the alarmed bow-paddler.

"I had not heard that the spirits of our ancestors were wont to return to us in whale-boats," retorted his companion drily. Then imperatively, "Paddle on, or he will soon be truly a spirit!"

The first man was not completely reassured, however, because he called out, "*E koro*—O respected elder—are you ghost or man?—*Aku-Aku tangata tehea*?"

The old man cried, "Take us to your island, friend. The sea has been kind to us but we have come far and would rest a while."

So the fishermen took the boat in tow and beached it in front of their village at the edge of the lagoon.

When they lifted the child out, his legs were swollen and his arms like matchsticks, though he was chattering excitedly. They made a great fuss of him, for there is nowhere else on earth where children are so cherished as in the Tuamotus. The man had collapsed, in reaction to his ordeal. He lay back

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on the thwart, with ribs protruding beneath taut transparent skin, while he was given sips of coconut milk.

"Where are you from, *E koro*?" they asked him.

He seemed not to hear; but after a few moments he muttered, "The steamer sank in *te tai a marama*—the sea of the moon—three weeks ago."

"So far!"

Then, for the first time, his blank eyes opened and the fishermen stood aghast. Sightless and scarred, those eyes of his must have been long stone-blind.

"It would have been easy," he mumbled, "but the star path is hid for ever from me."

The head man broke the long silence. "Look well at this distinguished chief, look and remember; such as he were the heroes of old, such were Ru and Maui—this is a real man!"

The tale was ended. As the story-teller fell silent, the group on the deck of our yacht stirred, their shadows stretching gigantic in the sunset.

"I spoke true words that day," added the head man thoughtfully, and without false modesty.

"*E hoa*, you were right in what you said."

"What happened to them, the man and the boy?" I asked. I was rather startled—I had taken this to be a tale of long ago.

The head man stood up and peered out over the lagoon towards the ocean beyond. Then he pointed. "See their whale-boat yonder, nearing the reef pass now. They love their boat those two—always out fishing and visiting other islands. They take a friend with them, but of course the old man could find his way through the pass by himself, now that he knows it."

"He could indeed," the others confirmed, "for is he not a Tuamotun seaman?"

Only too readily I recalled that reef pass—a terrifying place, where the lazy Pacific rollers took life and charged the jagged coral, then swept frothing and surging across the whole narrow spray-drenched gap. "Oh—of course!" I agreed.

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◇ David Lewis is a qualified doctor of medicine as well as a renowned sailor and navigator. At present he is sailing round the world with his wife and two children in a forty-two foot catamaran in which he has locked away all instruments to navigate Polynesian style

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Patrick Campbell

GETS COLD FEET

THERE was no doubt about it—the dogs, the trotters, the pedal extremities—anything is better than the fearful word "feet"—were stone-frozen, and this after no less than a whole hour in bed. It was old age, that's what it was—old age striking suddenly in the cold, silent night... Without warning, I began thinking about hot-water bottles. With eagerness, in place of the nausea that these floppy, sloppy, revoltingly old-maidenly cosy, rubbery-slubbery, feet-impregnated water-bags had always previously engendered. A hot-water bottle now would put the Grim Reaper back a year or two, take his scythe away from my feet.

Next morning I was prowling up and down outside the windows of the largest chemist's shop I could find. Now that I'd decided to buy a hot-water bottle, to take this dramatic, traumatic step from vibrant youth to chilly old age, I wanted a real, bang-up whizzer of a hot-water bottle, a big rough, tough hot-water bottle covered in genuine leopard-skin or made of tooled leather—a real man's hot-water bottle, a White Hunter's hot-water bottle that could be used on safari as a wine-skin.

"Didja want something?" The usual multiple-range chemist's assistant, eighteen years of age, lavender-nylon working coat, the hair tipped, dipped, bleached and lacquered with the entire multiple-range from the cosmetic counter.

"Do you have any bittle botters than those?"

"I beg yah pardon?"

Nervousness had tangled my speech. I worked down through "botter bittles" into "better hot-batter battles" and eventually got home to "better hot-bottles than those."

"I could do you," she said, "a comfie or a quiltie."

They were covered with a short, synthetic fur that felt like the skin of a shaved bull-terrier. I chose an old rose. When I got the old rose home, I found she'd forgotten to provide me with a stopper. I didn't feel like going back.

The nights are easier now. The wine-bottle cork stuffed into the neck of an old rubbery-slubbery gives her—I mean him—a sort of masculine look, a quick, backwoodsmanlike improvisation against a sudden nip in the weather. It makes it look as though I didn't really mean it after all.

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His first coherent thought was to turn and run away

A PRESENT FOR THE CAID

BY LIONEL DAVIDSON

DEREK LEEROYD awoke to the most appalling row he had ever heard in his life, and lay for a while with eyes closed, reorientating himself. He was in Tangier. He had arrived the previous night. A schoolboy in 1939, he had never been abroad before the war—had scarcely set foot outside his native Yorkshire.

Now he was on his first business trip with 150,000 prayer rugs to sell; and very little idea how to start.

These elements of the situation unfolded on him in a single familiar surge of panic that made him draw up his legs and try to sink back into sleep. But the roar of Tangier, the indefinable *foreign* smell could not be shut out. He sat up and looked around him.

The kindly orange light filtering through the shutters made little difference to the room. It was as flyblown and fifth-rate as it had looked the night before.

He got out of bed, felt for his slippers and dressing-gown, and opened the shutters. A white hot burst of sunlight exploded in his face. The noise, which had been muted and featureless in bed, was like a madhouse in the clear, hot air of the morning. When he could look again, he saw that it was only a street market, that it seemed to be a routine event. He was not in the best part of town. That, at least, should satisfy his father.

He turned away from the window, smiling wryly. It was just three days ago that he had gone into his father's office and asked for a rise.

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"A rise? Do you think you're worth any more than you're getting?"

"Damn it, Dad, I'm supposed to be a—a director. I'm only getting apprentice's pay. I can't even take a girl out properly."

"Then don't take girls out till you can afford it. How old are you—twenty-three? At twenty-three I was supporting a family and paying off the mortgages on this place. Of course, I didn't have the advantages of a university education."

The familiar jibe. But at last his father had relented; or at least had given him a fresh opportunity. There had been a series of them.

The firm had recently bought up an old bankrupt woollen mill. In the warehouse, hidden away beneath tons of unfashionable and unsaleable material, had been found an enormous stock of rugs of unusual design. One of the older hands thought these might be Arab prayer rugs; the firm had apparently done a small and steady trade in them up till 1939. This was confirmed when the accounts department, several weeks later, came across old invoices and receipts from Tangier.

The business had apparently been conducted through an agent, one Edmond Lecoq.

Leeroyd senior had written to Lecoq, sending a sample and asking for a quotation. Lecoq had replied that there was little demand now for the rugs, but that he was willing in the interests of maintaining an old connection to offer for the whole consignment at the 1939 rate. This worked out at four and sixpence a rug, ex-mill; an insultingly low price but nevertheless, in the circumstances, clear profit.

"Now then," said Derek's father, "when I was building up the business this is just the sort of thing I liked to get my teeth into. You say you're a director. Well then, get on out there and direct. I want a better price than that."

Derek was so stunned by the assignment that it was an hour before he returned to a sense of reality. That was when he had shown his father the draft of a cable to Lecoq asking him to book a room at an inexpensive hotel. His father read the draft and grunted. But he only changed one word. For "inexpensive" he substituted "cheap."

Monsieur Lecoq had an offhand and supercilious air about him that Derek found extremely irritating. He was a little thin man in a rustling tropical suit and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles that seemed too big for his face.

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"I trust you rested well," he said, "although one cannot expect all comfort if one chooses such a category. It is a mistake sometimes to be too economical. You are the son of the director?"

"Yes," Derek said.

Monsieur Lecoq sniffed. "I told clearly to your father the best price I could make. Please tell me why you have made this journey?"

"We hoped for a better price."

Monsieur Lecoq smiled bitterly. "Your father then does not trust me. Attend, monsieur. I have been in this abominable place for thirty years. I am the premier agent here. These rugs of yours—do you recognise the design?"

"They are prayer rugs."

"Of course. The Beni Ca'adi tribesmen of the Rif pray on them. Only the Ca'adi. Do you know these people?"

"No."

"I know them well. There are perhaps two or three hundred thousand of them. They must buy their prayer rugs only from their lord, the Caid Suleiman Mohammed. You have perhaps heard of him?"

"I'm afraid I haven't."

"I have known him for over twenty-five years. He buys these rugs exclusively from me. I supply him also, clandestinely, with guns, ammunition and helicopter parts. The Ca'adi are a rather fierce people but very poor. Do you know how the Caid can buy these weapons?"

"Monsieur Lecoq," said Derek, trying to take a stand, "I am willing to grant that you—"

"Attend a little minute more, monsieur. On every article that I sell the Caid for his people, he adds his own tax. A prayer rug, for instance—let us say one of yours. After shipping and so forth, it will cost me six English shillings—approximately thirty-two *pesetas*. To this, one must add carriage, Customs, my profit and the Caid's tax at ten per cent. Thus, the rug will cost a Ca'adi forty-six *pesetas*. Do you know what he pays at the moment? Fifty *pesetas*. And for this he gets a plastic backing of immense strength—an invaluable extra for these poor people who pray under such exacting conditions."

Monsieur Lecoq sat back. "For many years now I have bought only from Kaganovitch Frères in Belgium. The trade is steady at fifty thousand rugs a year. However, since you have this large consignment I am prepared to take them at

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six English shillings delivered Tangier—that is four and sixpence, ex-mill. Perhaps, cutting my own profit, I could go to six and one-tenth shillings since you have made the journey, but this is the absolute maximum."

For the life of him, Derek could think of no useful retort. Monsieur Lecoq's frighteningly swift and muscular manipulation of *pesetas* had thrown him into a panic. He said the first thing that came into his head. "Does this Caid Suleiman live very far away?"

The moment he said it he cringed at the inanity of the question and waited in a sick and palpitating silence for the agent's contemptuous smile.

Monsieur Lecoq took off his glasses but he did not smile. His eyes narrowed a little. He regarded Derek for several seconds. "My dear young gentleman," he said at length, "I would not advise you to make this fearful journey. Apart from the dangers it would be fruitless. The only European merchant the Caid has ever received is myself. The idea is laughable."

But still he did not laugh, and neither did Derek who gazed at the agent in open-mouthed astonishment. For the first time in three days he felt a stirring inside him. The two men gazed at each other a few moments longer, both aware now of the mistaken interpretation; aware, too, that a third figure, accidentally invoked, had joined their deliberations.

"Well," said Derek slowly, at last, "this has been a valuable discussion. I am naturally sorry you cannot increase your offer, but I'll cable my father."

Monsieur Lecoq's face was a cheering spectacle.

In the cab back to his hotel, some of Derek's swiftly-risen morale sank. It was one thing to allow Lecoq to think he was going to the Caid direct; quite another to do so. He hadn't the faintest idea how to set about it. For a moment he was tempted to stop the cab and return to accept the offer. But he did not do so.

He paid off the taxi and entered the hotel gloomily. The *patron*, dressed in a vest and an unbuttoned waistcoat, sat behind the desk in the vestibule reading the paper. He greeted Derek without enthusiasm.

"It is twelve hours," he said, tapping his watch. "It is necessary to depart with the baggage unless you desire the room again."

"I see," Derek said, and paused. It would do no harm to

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keep the room for another night. He had achieved precious little so far anyway. He said slowly, "I suppose you don't know how I could get to see the Caid Suleiman?"

"Of the Beni Ca'adi?"

"Yes."

"You go by jeep?"

"Well, I don't know," Derek said. Mention of the prosaic vehicle and the *patron*'s matter-of-fact acceptance of the mission was making him nervous. "I suppose it would be extremely expensive. *Très cher,* do you think?"

The *patron* shrugged. "You go in jeep, you buy it. When you return, sell it. You lose perhaps six thousand *pesetas.* It is cheaper by mule with dragoman. Two, three hundred *pesetas* a day and food."

"How long would that take?"

"How long you stay with the Caid? One day, two?"

"Well I—dammit," said Derek, sitting down. "I hadn't thought—say two."

"*Alors,*" said the *patron* promptly. "Eight days the whole trip, two thousand *pesetas,* including English-speaking dragoman. You desire that I arrange?"

Derek felt his head throbbing abominably. Eight days. Twenty pounds. He said unhappily, "All right. I suppose you'd better fix it up."

"You have presents?"

"Presents?" He stared at the man.

"The Caid expects presents," the *patron* said very patiently. He muttered to himself for a moment and departed into a back room.

He reappeared presently, beckoning.

Derek followed him into the small room. Two crates stood on the floor. Taking the lid off one, the *patron* removed an object wrapped in Cellophane. It proved to be a wax pear.

"You like this?" he said, gazing at it. "Very artistic fruit. Also *pommes, oranges, raisins.* Regard."

Derek gazed at the imitation fruit. They were very bad imitations and here and there parts of them had melted in the intense heat.

"My brother-in-law, now dead, was the great fabricator of such products of all kinds. Regard now." The *patron* took the top off the other crate and withdrew a figurine of a girl in a very short skirt with a band round her forehead. It was at least thirty years old and, as far as Derek could recall, the most appalling little figurine he had ever seen in his life.

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There were several dozen more like it—all just as appalling.

"There is enormous demand for such art objects in the desert. No fruit, you understand, no art novelties, there. They are considered very *chic*."

"But aren't they rather—old?" Derek said.

The *patron*'s amiability, fully extended, went in a notch. Somewhat huffily he began repacking the objects. "In the desert, fashion does not come and go. I make you cheap price, eight hundred *pesetas*. *Alors*, monsieur, purchase other presents if you desire."

"No, no," Derek said, hastily. "I'll take them."

("You spent eight quid on *what*?" he could hear a distant voice bellowing. Well, there was time to deal with that, too.)

The dragoman, who proved to be a grinning young Arab of perhaps fifteen, called Ismael, arrived with the mules before dinner. The street market had been cleared away but the streets were still crowded and Derek, feeling conspicuously Mad English, inspecting the two listless animals as quickly as he could, approving them in extravagant and emphatic terms.

He arranged with Ismael to start before the market opened in the morning.

And next morning, after a restless and feverish night, he set off.

Derek awoke cautiously, counting the familiar aches: ankles, knees, hips, back. Shoulders and neck were rested and that was strange. He twisted round and saw the ancient, striped bolster and remembered all. It was ten o'clock when they had arrived at the Caid's palace. There had been interminable discussions with a series of white-robed, black-bearded men, and then he had been taken to this small, cell-like room, offered a rug and, after further discussions, an old bolster. He had not taken part in any of the discussions and thought he must have been asleep long before his head touched the bolster.

The three-day mule journey into the Rif had been the most nightmarish of Derek's experience. By the end he could not imagine any other form of existence; he seemed to have been travelling for years and expected to travel for more years.

He neither believed nor disbelieved when, at dusk on the third day, the grinning youth pointed to fine specks in the distance and said, "Trees." He had been seeing complete forests of them, off and on; going up and down in a lift.

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As he sat up now and looked around him, he saw a small boy sitting cross-legged in the corner and regarding him very seriously. At his start of astonishment, the boy jumped up and left the room, to return a moment later with a large jug and bowl.

He spoke a few words and motioned eagerly for Derek to wash, and watched professionally while Derek, with some embarrassment, did so. The moment he had finished, the boy disappeared again, to return with breakfast. This appeared to be a mutton chop, and there was no cutlery.

However, Derek now found he had a voracious appetite and ate it gratefully.

The instant he had finished and was wiping his hands on a towel, the boy, who had been watching him intently, called loudly, and two white-robed, dangerous-looking men appeared followed by Ismael.

"We see Caid now," Ismael said, grinning suicidally. "You have slept late. The Caid waits one hour."

Derek sprang up in a panic. He had not prepared what he should say to the Caid. "The presents—" he said.

"Outside," Ismael said. "Ca'adi men carry them."

Derek followed the men out of the room. He followed them down a long corridor and stopped with them outside a curtained doorway. One of the men entered and reappeared a moment later, beckoning.

Derek went in.

It was a larger version of the room he had slept in, bare except for rugs on the walls, a fine carpet on the floor, and a small table. Sitting on a cushion, reading papers, was the Caid. He was an elderly man, robed, with a short white beard and a spare, intelligent face. On the table was a pair of glasses.

The Caid without rising extended his hand, and Derek, not knowing whether to kiss it or shake it, took it limply in his, and executed a slight bob.

The Caid now began to speak and the dragoman sidled up, no longer grinning, and listened respectfully. The Caid spoke for perhaps a minute and Ismael translated. "The Caid says you are welcome. He very *triste* not to welcome you last night. He loves the Queen."

The old man had plainly said a good deal more than this and Derek, feeling something on the same scale was called for, stumbled into speech, borrowing heavily from Rider Haggard. To his surprise it came very easily, and he was not

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discouraged even when Ismael translated it into a dozen words. The Caid was smiling in a mild, pleased sort of way.

To Derek's relief, the presents were now brought in. He removed the lids from both crates and, selecting an orange and a figurine, placed them with somewhat exaggerated care on a small table.

The effect was highly satisfactory. The retainers, crowding round, emitted small gasps and the Caid himself, after an initial moment of bewilderment, put on his spectacles to examine the art works more closely. Smiling with pleasure, he looked up and asked a question.

"The Caid asks how one uses such objects," Ismael said.

Derek smiled. "In England we do not decorate our walls with rugs. Instead, here and there on shelves or tables we display such objects as these to make the rooms beautiful."

The Caid nodded seriously while this was passed on to him, but he could not keep back his smiling pleasure, and was soon asking to see the other specimens. Derek showed them with great affability.

Never, he thought to himself, had eight pounds been better invested.

These preliminaries took up most of the morning and left little time for business. Derek managed to broach the subject, and the Caid nodded with mild interest, but his eyes continually strayed to the crates, and the session came to an end.

Derek was shown back to his room where the boy eagerly waited. Presently he had another mutton chop.

There was no opportunity for him to see the Caid again that day, and he was kept hanging about for most of the next. By the afternoon, when he was given an audience, he'd managed to work himself into a fine fury that this primitive lordling should keep him waiting.

"And observe also," he went on after half an hour, "the backing. Everything here is of true natural material. No plastic or other synthetic substitutes have been used—the whole article is simple and good, such as simple, good men have used for centuries."

He was a little hoarse with talking and thought he might have overworked his adjectives: the Caid's lack of comment was making him repeat himself.

The Caid stirred slightly but said nothing, and Derek said, "Before the war, as you know, these were sold to Monseiur Lecoq in Tangier for thirty-two *pesetas*. The raw materials and labour have now gone up more than three times but

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because of our large stock we are willing to make these rugs available at less than double the price. Sixty *pesetas*," he said tentatively.

The Caid waited for this to be translated and smiled.

"What price has the Caid in mind?"

The Caid had no price in mind. He said presently that he was very happy with his present arrangements for prayer rugs. If he could secure others at some real saving to his people he would naturally do so... And now it was time for evening prayers. If Derek would care later to join him for the evening meal, he would be very welcome. It would not be necessary to use the dragoman since the Caid's wife spoke French and even a little English.

Derek rose stiffly from his cushion, baffled at the evasion but intrigued at the prospect of the meal, and returned to his room. He had the feeling he was swimming in a lake of syrup. Unless the Caid gave some indication of what price he would pay, he had no idea of what goal to set himself. What sort of inducement could he offer to get a response?

It was while the boy in his room was holding the bowl for him to wash in that it came to him, and he stopped dead, smiling idiotically, his face dripping.

Of course! The presents! The senile old chump, unable to take his mind off the presents, was angling for more. Probably wanted an immense collection, rooms stuffed with them!

Derek began to towel himself vigorously, smiling warmly at the boy, who returned the smile uncertainly. He saw how the whole thing could be done, a crate of some fancy rubbish with each ten thousand rugs. A thumping good price of, say, fifty-five *pesetas* a rug, and loud, long raspberries to Edmond Lecoq with his thirty years' experience!

He laughed out loud.

He could scarcely wait to see his father's face as he explained the deal.

When the summons came for dinner, he answered it with pleasure. He felt larger than life, capable of sustained and fascinating conversation over dinner. He looked forward to seeing the Caid's wife and discoursing of the manners and modes of the palaces of the west. He could see the whole thing, the bare, quiet room, the modest old lady hanging on his words, putting from time to time a gentle question.

He felt in such tremendous, conquering form that when he

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entered the Caid's private apartment, the shock was as if he had stepped suddenly out of earth's orbit.

A European woman was sitting in the most beautiful and elegantly-appointed room he had ever seen. She was sitting in an easy chair reading *Vogue*. She was sheathed in a long gown of pale green sequins; an exquisite pendant hung from her throat; on her finger was a huge emerald, and round her wrist a tiny, jewelled watch. She was the most sophisticated and *soignée* creature he had encountered in his entire life.

He had been announced and the woman looked up. As he did not move she arose and came towards him; and Derek's first coherent thought was to turn round and run away; run for miles and miles into the desert. But he stood completely paralysed.

"Mr.—Leelong, is it?" she inquired, extending her hand. "My husband has not a facile ear for English names."

"Leeroyd," Derek said dully. He was not aware of the hand until she was dropping it, and then took it with fumbling haste and held it too long.

He was still locked in this position when the Caid entered the room, and the woman turned away in some relief. She spoke in Arabic and the Caid smiled. Derek's appalled eyes were still taking in the furnishings. There were fine pictures on the walls; flowers everywhere; fruit in bowls of silver and elegant Lalique; and little trinkets that looked like Fabergé.

"My husband reminds me," the woman was saying, with the slightest accent, "I must apologise for not meeting you earlier. I like to go to Paris twice a year and he met me at Tangier only last night. I hope you have been comfortable here. When I am away arrangements for guests are inclined to be primitive."

Derek heard his own voice replying, but he was not consciously aware of what he said. He was consciously aware of very little for some time, except for occasional incidents that broke excruciatingly through his stupor.

One of them was at dinner when the Caid, recollecting himself, asked a servant to bring a silver tray from a shadowy recess of the room, and Derek saw that a careful arrangement had been made of some of the specimens he had brought with him. This the Caid exhibited to his wife who, after one unbelieving glance at the appalling wax and china travesties, turned to him with a rigid smile and murmured, "Enchanting."

The Caid himself gazed at them a moment longer with his

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original pleased smile, and Derek realised that the old fellow was doubled up with laughter and must have been the first time.

But the evening passed. He returned hollowly down the corridors to his room, to sink back on his bolster, too dispirited to undress.

It had been a cruel little game of the Caid's; an effective way certainly of showing contempt for the crude guile Derek had sought to employ. And, perhaps, a rejection of his aged, fading wares? Derek could not bear to think about that. Lecoq was right. One had to know the market. He should have taken his price while he could. He would do it when he got back if it was still open. He would leave first thing next morning.

He slept at last, and overslept, and came to, unrested and weary with humiliation, to find Ismael shaking him and the boy waiting with a bowl of water.

"The Caid desires to see you," the dragoman said, grinning.

A wash. Another mutton chop, chewed stoically. And then he was walking down the corridor and back to the bare room and facing the Caid on his cushion.

Although he had spoken French the night before, the old man persisted in talking Arabic, and Ismael stood respectfully, translating. At his first words, Derek gazed at the Caid, scarcely able to believe his ears.

"The Caid will buy the rugs. Fifty *pesetas* each. He will arrange transport from Tangier."

Concrete terms when he expected none: at a price higher than he dared hope! And then he realised... The Caid had had his fun. Perhaps nothing had amused him so much for years. Now he was prepared to pay for it. A purse of gold for a jester...

His humiliation this time made him angry, and he said stolidly, "Tell him my price is fifty-five *pesetas*."

Ismael spoke and the Caid, smiling now, waved his hand and spoke a few words.

"The Caid says he does not bargain. The price he offers is already foolishly high."

Derek was so angry, the blood pounding sullenly in his temples, that he wanted to answer equally negligently. But he thought of his father and knew he could not afford the gesture. He said directly to the Caid, "All right."

The details were written in Arabic and French, and both men signed, and Derek stood up. The Caid rose with him.

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Still smiling, he held out his hand, and spoke in French. "Perhaps you will return some day."

"Perhaps," Derek said. To give you another laugh, he thought.

"There is much a young man can learn in the Rif."

"That is evident."

"All is not as it seems."

"As you say."

"You have spirit. I will remember you warmly."

"And I you." Roasting in hell, he hoped; as warmly as that.

Three days of discomfort, milder this time physically, perhaps, because of the greater discomfort mentally. Derek had never felt quite so shamed in his life before. He had pulled off the deal, certainly, at a better price than his father had expected—by being a performing monkey. It was not a pleasant thought.

Ismael had been paid in advance, but Derek tipped him quite generously when they came to the suburbs and taxis, and the boy went off into the dusk with his mules, grinning with delight. Derek told the taxi-driver to take him to the best hotel in town, feeling savagely that it was the least his self-respect demanded.

After he had bathed and shaved and changed, he felt a little more human. And later, when he was enjoying a drink at the bar, he found he could even smile at the whole experience.

Before going in to dinner he signed the book, and the name above his stirred a memory. Kaganovitch. He could not place it for the moment, and went in. But the instant he sat down it came to him. Kaganovitch. Kaganovitch Frères of Belgium: the firm supplying Lecoq.

At once he experienced a lightening of spirits. This *frère* Kaganovitch was in for a little surprise. And so too—he came across the thought with delight, surprised that it had not occurred to him before—was Edmond Lecoq. The Caid would not be requiring his fifty thousand rugs a year for quite a long time.

This cheering thought carried him through dinner, and afterwards, as he was having coffee in the lounge, he asked the waiter to point out Monsieur Kaganovitch.

Monsieur Kaganovitch was an elegant little man in a light tropical suit and a bow-tie, who was drinking brandy and exposing an inch of silk cuff. Derek studied him carefully

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and, when he had finished his coffee, he walked slowly over.

"Monsieur Kaganovitch, isn't it?" he asked in English. "Weren't you in London for the Trade Fair?"

"The Trade Fair, yes," the man said, mystified.

"I thought I recognised you. I was looking at rugs."

"Rugs," Kaganovitch said, brightening a good deal. "You are a buyer? I'm afraid I don't remember the name—excuse me—"

"Leeroyd," Derek said. He would doubtless know it soon enough, anyway. "What brings you to Tangier, Monsieur Kaganovitch?"

"Rugs," said Kaganovitch, smiling. "Forgive me for not recognising you. Please take a seat. Prayer rugs. They are of a special design for a Moslem sect and I like to come out to see my agent every year or so."

"Really?" Derek said. "Prayer rugs. I don't think I've ever— Do you happen to have one with you, Monsieur Kaganovitch?"

"But yes," said the little man eagerly. "As it happens I have one in my valise. *Voilà.*"

The nimble fingers withdrew a small, thin, folded rug and quickly shook it open.

Derek gazed at it, his jaw dropping. This was a travesty of a rug. It was not half the size of his; a crude postage stamp of a rug in false, lurid colours.

Noting his expression, Monsieur Kaganovitch swiftly returned it to his valise. "It is not, of course, a specimen of what we can do. But what would you? One manufactures to a price for this market. You must remember they are poor people..."

"How much," Derek said faintly, "how much do you receive for such a rug, if the question is not indiscreet?"

"Fifty *pesetas*," Kaganovitch said. "That, of course, is the agent's price. He adds his profit and the local Caid adds his—believe me, *mon ami*, everyone profits except the producer. It is not satisfactory to produce a shoddy article, but what would you—"

"The Caid, then, pays over sixty *pesetas*?"

"That is so... I will tell you," he said, lowering his voice and drawing closer, "that is one of the reasons for my visit. I should like, if possible, to deal directly with the Caid. I was lucky enough to meet him in this very hotel a few nights ago and I think I interested him. After all, sixty *pesetas* is less than he is paying now. But—" he placed a finger on his lips—

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" this is, of course, in confidence. But come, monsieur, will you take a cognac with me?"

" I will," said Derek, needing one badly. Sixty *pesetas* for this mockery of a rug; and he had taken fifty and thought himself lucky. He felt himself blushing to the roots of his hair, felt the familiar churning-up process as he revised all his assessments, felt a sudden pang of pity for little Monsieur Kaganovitch.

But as he settled down that night in his first-class bed in his first-class room, he was not dissatisfied with himself. Business, he saw, was composed of many simple tricks and manœuvres, but each could only be used on the same person once; and he was learning them fast. He was an amateur who had been flung among professionals. Give or take a few principles, he had not done so badly.

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WOLF MANKOWITZ

A colourful author takes an extraordinary look at ordinary people

THE ART OF DYING SLOWLY

THE draught which blew from the slightly open window through to the space under the door was hardly noticeable on its own, but then it happened to strike upon the neck of the middle-aged lady who had just entered with a work-basket and had chosen, with no deliberate intention to inconvenience herself, to sit exactly in the place where even a slight draught would affect her not-very-fleshy person.

Though she stuck it for a few minutes, it was hardly to be expected that things could go on like that.

It cost her a slight effort, for he was deeply involved. He was deciding how the unfortunate news that had been announced on the radio a few minutes previously could inconvenience him personally; but it had to be done and, bracing herself to disturb him, she mentioned it—apologetically, for she did not wish him to feel that he was in any way to blame:

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"My dear, don't you feel this draught rather? I know I'm somewhat silly about these things, but don't you notice it yourself?"

Her husband jerked himself out of his preoccupation quickly, for fear that he had upset things rather by bothering about affairs which could never really be as important as the flesh-and-blood business of their living, and replied, "I'll close the window, dear."

And to make it perfectly clear that it was not his fault that a draught should blow directly on to her neck for several minutes he said:

"You should have mentioned it before."

He closed the window and she looked up at him with a grateful smile which pleased him, though sometimes he felt it somewhat unproportional to the small things for which it was the graciously-offered reward.

She was, after all, his wife and entitled to these extra comforts which, when he thought of them, he was prepared to give without worrying very much.

As he returned to his armchair he straightened an antimacassar which some careless person had pulled crooked in the course of the day's sitting.

When he sat down he tried to think back to his earlier preoccupation, but the thought was lost. As he searched about his mind for some shade of the worrying possibility he had been considering, his fingers traced out a three-pointed pattern upon his forehead.

They moved to a regular rhythm.

His eyes looked down towards the carpet, blankly at first, and then with recognition. For a few seconds they stared knowingly at something or other down there, and he slowly moved his feet.

The middle-aged lady looked up at him with inquiry in her sunken eyes as he left his chair and bent down to straighten the untidy fold in the carpet which had disturbed him.

Though his previous point of anxiety had slipped away from him, life was still a continual worry.

If it was difficult to hold on to the same thing for very long, there was always something bigger or smaller ready to take its place.

The middle-aged lady seemed to find her needlework—she was stitching name tags on to new socks—absorbing. He had sat down again and was staring.

It was almost as if they were waiting for a guest—one who

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was very late, but was too valued a friend to be blamed for it. They were not, however, expecting a visitor. If anyone called now, an hour or so before they retired to prepare for bed, it would merely be inconvenient; though no-one could say that they were inhospitable. There was, however, a time for everything.

As he sat, slightly stiff in the armchair, his head bent to receive the movement of his fingers, aware that his wife had nearly completed the task which she had set herself for the evening, he knew that everything in the house was quite in order.

For that short time before they began to prepare themselves for the night, and the routine of sleeping, everything was calmly established, precisely placed, as if there were no tomorrow to upset the arrangements with fresh disturbances from outside.

It was for that little while a clean pattern.

He could contemplate it with a full realisation of his power of control over irritations which, he felt, were daily directed at him in increasing numbers, but with a regularity which was their downfall; for through their regularity they were conquered.

He kept in his notebook a scrap of paper on which were tabulated the names and natures of today's worlds subjugated together with those of tomorrow, in the order in which they were to be attacked.

But this moment between the areas of troublesome duties he could call his own—and in his quiet way he quietly relished the luxury.

He could feel the dull electric light pulling at the corners of his eyes and, glancing at the clock, discovered from the time that he was tired.

His wife, he knew, would not consider herself entitled to go to bed until her duty towards the socks had been quite discharged.

And smiling inwardly at her pride, he respected her zeal for the daily round, and mused with satisfaction over the smooth running of their lives upon the rails of a detailed routine towards which they held, he acknowledged gratefully, equally conscientious attitudes.

The middle-aged lady was not as aware of her husband at that moment as he was of her.

His presence was something of which she was certain, for

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the armchair in which he should be sitting was—she could see from the corner of her eye—unmoved. He was, furthermore, the assured background without which the sewing, for example, could not be done.

But in her own sphere she was his equal, and while he listed his worrisome duties, she noted hers by an equally careful system.

Whatever she had to do about the house the following day had already been discussed with the servants, and each of them was pledged to remember the arrangements affecting them. The lady knew that they were bound to remember by the very terms of their service, as well as by their personal attachment to her. As her hands, pledged to the successful running of the domestic details of their lives, picked out the stitching on the little labels which marked yet another aspect of those lives with distinction, she knew she was doing her best, that it was enough and—a sudden recognition of the presence about the armchair—she was appreciated as something which was wholly as it ought to be.

Looking up, she caught his eye and the grateful smile was something which, though she gave it, they both had earned.

This, then, could be considered their certain hour, and in its existence their success demonstrated itself. With the curtains drawn, and the sure knowledge of what was to come surrounding them with an aura of security, they had nothing to await, nothing to fear. The objects of the house grouped about them, they were as safe as if the tomb enclosed them with a finite routine of appropriate epitaph, flowers and quiet decorations.

He closed his eyes for a moment. Lights moved systematically around behind the darkening lids.

She put the final sock down and leaned back, relaxing into the cushion which he had carefully placed behind her earlier in the evening. There was no doubt much cause for movement, for noise and vulgarity outside, beyond the curtains, but here with so little remaining to do there was no need for bustle.

She smoothed her forehead with a thin hand and pushed a strand of hair away. Her husband opened his eyes. The lights had moved so frantically that it was perhaps more prudent, less tiresome, to replace them by the dull electric light again.

He moved his position slightly and without any reference

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to the situation or the point of time, the telephone began to ring.

They looked at each other apprehensively as the calculated ringing cut across the room. Then he left his chair and the expression of violent rage upon his face, the muttered curse, were understandable to her, knowing as she did that the importunate demand, the remorseless ringing, fell upon them when, tired and pendant, they had such a little time to await their fall into sleep.

She heard him lift the receiver and his voice attacking it from behind the mask of preliminary questions and answers.

Then his tone changed and, listening, she also changed. She sat up expectant, waiting for his account of both the interruption and his apparent surprise. For he could be, if he wanted to, quite rude to the inconsiderate caller, so that his voice, hushed now and considerate, indicated that this was not an opportunity for him to be rude or for her to gently rebuke.

In a few moments he had returned. She looked up at him and saw that he was moved. There was no rage left in him now, and as he spoke she knew from the tone of his voice that this was an occasion of some importance.

He told her with admirable composure, "It's Aunt Violet. You know she was ill. She died peacefully at precisely ten to eleven."

And his wife replied immediately, "Oh, what a pity! Poor old lady. Such a kind— but then I'm so glad the end was easy for her. She didn't deserve to suffer. Such an old dear."

He nodded and sat down.

They both looked thoughtful, remembering the old woman as they had seen her last—hardly able to identify them, but still very interested in everything: whether the house had been decorated; if the old cook was still with them; how the children were getting on—still very much alive. He rubbed his forehead for a few seconds, and looked at the clock.

The middle-aged lady looked up. "So kind—such a kind old lady. And oh, her poor husband, poor Uncle Arthur, how sorry I feel for him! I do feel sorry for the old, really I do. It seems such a terrible shame."

His wife had gone to see the old woman regularly and he too, had been quite often. Perhaps he should have gone two days ago, when they first heard that she had taken a turn for the worse. But there was always so much to do. His day was well-filled.

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His wife had been often. But to be old . . . He was sorry about it.

The middle-aged lady put away the socks and looked at him. "We shall have to write to Uncle Arthur, of course. Poor old man, how lonely for him it will be now that she has gone!"

He thought of the loneliness, the tragedy of the old. The clock ticked so loudly and the moments ran down his sorrow. He would write, of course. It was the least they could do.

These things always seemed to happen at night. "I shall write straight after breakfast in the morning, my dear," he said.

His wife sighed as he got out his pocket-book and made a note.

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TIP AND RUN

Tipping in these [hotels] is probably as great a source of anxiety as any public infection. As soon as you have a glimpse of the main door you are struck by a kind of rabies which suspends every counsel of caution and thrift that has been riveted into your head by lean years and the brass-bound Bibles of curmudgeonly elders. The first sight of the hall-porter billowing towards you like the last of the Romanoffs makes you feel that, whatever happens, you are not going to be exposed as a skate, a skinflint. You forget the dedicated discourtesy of the taxi-driver and try to dent his sullenness with a gift which, in a healthier moral climate, would be enough to buy the cab or at least justify you in whipping away one of his back wheels.

I've never mastered the art of being gracious about this. When the tipping moment approaches at the end of a meal I usually embarrass my wife to the point of collapse. I stuff my hand with change, gripping it hard to dull the pain. Then I change my mind, telling myself to keep something for those rainy days which are never far removed from a mind that is very much of a monsoon of dread. I start decanting the change from one hand to another, even standing up in an effort to decide the matter by weight. If the waiter detects you in this act of juggling, either slip him the lot or tell him that you are a violinist, a strangler or a wrestler who is trying to strengthen his hands. He won't believe you but it'll be another ordeal over.

GWYN THOMAS, *I Dreamt That I Dwelt*

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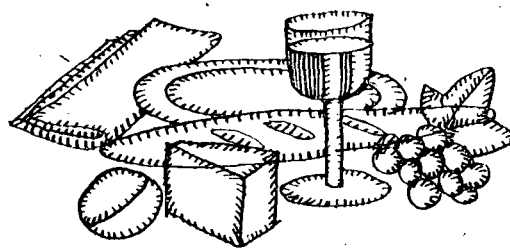
by B. L. JACOT



Not on the Menu

MONSIEUR PICON had something on his mind. Not a matter of outsmarting the income-tax man, or wondering whom de Gaulle was going to kick out of Europe next, or any of the trifling things a Frenchman has to weigh up from day to day. This was important.

Pointes d'asperge in a sharp wine sauce? Or Scottish smoked salmon? What you started your luncheon with made or marred the occasion. Why not go by the book? Salmon with that kippered-flavour . . .

At first his eye did not take it in. Here were the French children jumping about the Luxembourg Gardens like fleas, the Bretonne nurses, the balloon-seller, the sun bright on the pond. And this tall scholarly figure drifting by—

"*Nom de nom!*"

He was on his feet quivering like a bowstring, the sound of cavalry trumpets in his ears. "After all these years—*that man*!"

He trailed the shabby figure out into the rue Guynemer, into the rue de Fleurus, up four flights of stone stairs, and on the attic floor the man he was following seemed to notice the fact.

"You have a child needs coaching?"

"I have no child," Picon said, playing it down.

"Then what can I do for you, m'sieur?"

"You can take a close look, you hound." Picon filled his chest like a pigeon, making the most of his five-foot-seven.

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"Do you deny your name is Vernand? I have been looking for you for years."

The scholar started. "Why—Picon!"

Picon saw through the door the solitary table with a bare Formica top, the bottle of *vin ordinaire*, the loaf, the butt of grey liver-sausage, a brokendown chair.

"Different from that Cadillac of yours." To a millionaire manufacturer of mustard from Dijon, used to only the best in everything, this habitation looked unreal. "You and your polo sticks in the back."

"Times change," the tall man stated sadly.

"And the hour of reckoning comes, you snake-in-the-grass!"

"Happily, you continue to prosper, my old friend."

"Don't call me that," Picon shouted. Not even a pot of mustard; and that purple-coloured fluid must taste like metal polish.

"I often think of Héloïse," Vernand stated simply.

"I forbid you to think of her!"

"Who could have met her and not thought of her afterwards? All one's life, maybe..."

"Imbecile. Snake."

"Whatever you may say, whatever you may have in mind to do, the most spiritual of creatures. Divine."

Picon unclenched his fists, clearly too honest not to be touched. "Don't try to make excuses, even if what you say is true."

"I take what comes. I make no excuse for my conduct. I count myself privileged in—"

"Stealing my wife when you were a guest in our house! One day I knew I should meet you again. And now," said Picon, "I have!"

"I repeat I have no excuses, but let us at least face the facts, monsieur. I did not seduce your wife in your house."

"You lie, you hound! I have ample reason to shoot you."

"When she left me, I—"

"She left you, too?"

"An American, with hair *en brosse* from Oswego, wherever that may be. In asbestos and several times married, poor man."

"You had all the money in the world," Picon reminded him savagely.

"It soon went," the scholar recorded. "Eyes like wet violets."

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"True."

"A skin soft as the wing of a moth."

"Keep to the point," Picon shouted. "Skis on the roof-rack of your car when we came out of the bar into the carpark!"

"Never can I forget that weekend at your country *château,* dear friend. It was your wife who insisted, do you recall that?"

"I recall meeting you in the American bar of that hotel and the way you fell into conversation with Héloïse on the spot!"

"When a lady addresses you and asks for a light, what can one do, m'sieur?"

"One is not called upon to steal the same lady from her husband between *le five-o'clock* and next breakfast!"

"I assure you—"

"Save your coward's breath. This is no longer the age for pistols at dawn, but to throw you straight out of that window there—"

"Nor the age for violence, m'sieur. I beg of you, let us use our intelligence. The head rather than the heart, eh?"

"Don't try to talk yourself out of it!"

"I relate the facts. I leave your house after *le weekend* early on Monday morning to get back to Paris and before I go ten kilometres I see a Citroën *en panne.* Sitting at the wheel is Héloïse, your wife, who tells me that long since she had decided to leave you. She was broken-hearted..."

"Lies!"

"What could I do but drive her to Paris? And when I insisted she telephone to you... she wept."

In spite of himself Picon was moved. "I know."

"The heart of a child," the scholar reminded him. "You couldn't be unkind. You should know that."

"Yes, yes," Picon agreed. He was back on the scene now. "That skin soft as the wing of a moth."

"No need for cosmetics—"

"On that skin? Are you out of your mind?"

"Aren't we all?"

"I remember—" Picon began and stopped like a show horse changing her mind about a jump. "Don't try to talk me out of shooting you!"

"What difference would that make now? Whether you shoot me or not, the principle remains the same."

"How do you make that out, my friend?"

"I only mention the facts. One day we have a friend for

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lunch and he brings this American who is a big man with the hair *en brosse* and his trousers supported by a belt with a buckle showing his initials."

"The Cadillac, too?"

"Now you mention it, yes. Perhaps she had a thing about Cadillacs. That evening—"

"Skedaddle?"

"Yes. You'll say I should have shot him. And then that diplomat, too."

"What diplomat is this?"

"One with money from Buenos Aires. They returned there."

"She left him, too?"

"There was an Englishman who manufactured rubber boots and in Nottingham they—"

"Don't make a *histoire*!" Picon cried.

"I simply ask you—should one engage oneself in a non-stop shooting match?"

Picon ran a groping finger round his collar, watching the other for tricks. This business had not gone right and he was aware of this at the back of his mind. But there was something closer at hand, more urgent...

His problem still was not solved. The call of the cavalry trumpets had receded. The problem of what to eat for luncheon had not.

"Take the greatest of music," Monsieur Picon suggested. "How inspiring that can be—eh?"

"It raises the spirit to finer things."

"Poetry can do the same on occasion."

"Without doubt."

"Painting and the great monuments have their power to inspire, too. You would agree with me that these are among the unforgettable things of life?"

"I could not agree more."

"Yet—what can compare with woman?" Monsieur Picon asked.

"Ah! I see what you mean. What indeed!"

"Love comes only once in a lifetime, my friend."

"Love that only one woman can inspire," added the children's coach.

"And what a woman—while it lasted."

"Yes, indeed. How right you are. How right!" He paused to eye the pugnacious little man before him speculatively. "You have had second thoughts?"

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"Never about women! But about the need to throw you out of the window—perhaps, yes."

"Not everyone would understand."

Picon's eye had wandered to that piece of dry liver-sausage and the wine. He flinched and turned away.

"Love comes only once in a lifetime," he observed.

"As you said so truly a moment ago."

"But luncheon comes along every day."

"That is a thought, to be sure."

"So let us go and eat, my friend."

"You are kind enough to invite me to eat luncheon with you?"

"What else, imbecile? I had in mind *pointes d'asperge* at this time of the year."

"Excellent."

"But then Scottish salmon—you think, after a dry wine, smoked salmon, scraped on the plate to start?"

A dreamy look had come into the scholar's eye. "On second thoughts, I'm inclined to agree with you."

"*Canard-à-la-presse* to follow as the main course?"

"You should know, where the fine things of eating are concerned."

"All is not mustard," Picon corrected gently. "But with orange of course."

"Of course, orange."

Picon let loose a sigh and patted his waistline fondly. "Well, that's settled then," he said. He bowed. "After you, Vernand. After you."

"Ah, no!" the scholar exclaimed. "*After you.*"

They walked together down the stairs.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD (FEBRUARY ISSUE)

Across. 1, *Glances.* 5, *High-hat.* 9, *Special.* 10, *Whittle.* 11, *Avalanche.* 12, *Ephod.* 13, *Ocean.* 15, *Telepathy.* 17, *Overthrow.* 19, *Gross.* 22, *Usage.* 23, *Axminster.* 25, *Explain.* 26, *Winsome.* 27, *Tieless.* 28, *Rotunda.*

Down. 1, *Gestapo.* 2, *Average.* 3, *China.* 4, *Solicitor.* 5, *Hawse.* 6, *Guinea-pig.* 7, *Hatchet.* 8, *Tuesday.* 14, *Notre Dame.* 16, *Lawnmower.* 17, *Opulent.* 18, *Example.* 20, *Outworn.* 21, *Seriema.* 23, *Aunts.* 24, *Nonet.*

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TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Three Players *of a* Summer Game

CROQUET is a summer game that seems, in a curious way, to be composed of images, very much as a painter's abstraction of summer or one of its games would be composed of them. The delicate wire wickets set in a lawn of smooth emerald that flickers fierily at some points and rests under violet shadow in others; the wooden poles gaudily painted and like moments that stand out in a season that was a struggle for something of unspeakable importance to someone passing through it; the clean and hard wooden spheres of different colours and the strong, rigid shape of the mallets that drive the balls through the wickets; the formal design of those wickets and poles upon the croquet lawn—all this is like a painter's abstraction of a summer and a game played in it. And I cannot think of croquet without hearing a sound like the faraway booming of a cannon fired to announce a white ship coming into a harbour. The faraway booming sound is that of a green-and-white striped awning coming down over a gallery of a white frame house in Meridian, Mississippi. The house is of Victorian design carried to an extreme of improvisation, an almost grotesque pile of galleries and turrets and cupolas and eaves, all freshly painted white—so white

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Drawing by Margaret Theakston

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and so fresh that it has the blue-white glitter of a block of ice in the sun. The house is like a new resolution not yet tainted by any defection from it. And I associate the summer game with players coming out of this house with the buoyant air of persons just released from a suffocating enclosure. Their clothes are as light in weight and colour as the flattering clothes of dancers. There are three players—a woman, a man, and a little girl.

The voice of the woman player is not at all loud, yet it has a pleasantly resonant quality; it carries farther than most voices, and it is interspersed with peals of treble laughter. The woman player, even more than her male opponent in the game, has the grateful quickness of motion of someone let out of a suffocating enclosure; her motion has the quickness of breath released just after a moment of terror, of fingers unclenched when panic is suddenly past, or of a cry that subsides into laughter. She seems unable to speak or move about moderately; she moves convulsively in rushes, whipping her white skirts with long strides that quicken to running. Her skirts make a faint crackling sound as her pumping thighs whip them open—the sound that comes to you, greatly diminished by distance, when fitful fair-weather gusts belly out and slacken the faraway sails of a yawl.

This agreeably cool summer sound is accompanied by another, which is even cooler—the ceaseless, tiny chatter of beads hung in long loops from her throat. They are not pearls but they have a milky lustre; they are small, faintly speckled white ovals—polished bird eggs turned solid and strung upon glittery filaments of silver. The woman player is never still for a moment; sometimes she exhausts herself and collapses on the grass in the conscious attitudes of a dancer. She is a thin woman, with long bones and skin of a silky sheen, and her eyes are only a shade or two darker than the blue-tinted bird's-egg beads about her long throat. She is never still—not even when she has fallen in exhaustion on the grass.

The neighbours think she's gone mad, but they feel no pity for her, and that, of course, is because of her male opponent in the game. This player is Brick Pollitt, a young Delta planter, a man so tall, with such a fiery thatch of hair, that to see a flagpole on an expanse of green lawn or even a particularly brilliant weather vane or cross on a steeple is sufficient to recall that long-ago summer which his legend belongs to.

This male player of the summer game is a drinker who has not yet fallen beneath the savage axe blows of his liquor. He

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is not so young any more, but he has not yet lost the slim grace of his youth. He is a head taller than the tall woman player. He is such a tall man that even in those sections of the lawn dimmed under violet shadow his head continues to catch fiery rays of the descending sun, the way the heavenward-pointing index finger of a huge gilded hand atop a Protestant steeple in Meridian goes on drawing the sun's flame for a good while after the lower surfaces of the town have sunk into lingering dusk.

The third player of the summer game is the woman's daughter, a plump twelve-year-old child named Mary Louise. This little girl has made herself distinctly unpopular among the children of the neighbourhood by imitating too perfectly the elegant manners and cultivated Eastern voice of her mother. She sits in an electric automobile, on the sort of fat silk pillow that expensive lap dogs sit on, uttering treble peals of lady-like laughter, tossing her copper curls, using grown-up expressions such as "Oh, how delightful!" and "Isn't that just lovely!" She sits in the electric automobile sometimes all afternoon, by herself, as if she were on display in a glass box, only now and then raising a plaintive voice to call her mother and ask if it is all right for her to come in now, or if she can drive the electric around the block, which she is sometimes then permitted to do.

Our house was on the opposite corner, and I was the only child close to her age (I was a boy of fourteen) who could put up with her precocious refinements. For a very short time, she had had another friend, a little girl named Dorothea, and the two of them would get into their mothers' cast-off finery and have tea parties on the lawn, but one afternoon Dorothea took umbrage at something, overturned the tea-table, and stalked off, chanting a horrid little verse: "Smarty, Smarty, gave a party, Nobody came but a sad old darky!"

"Common!" Mary Louise shrieked after her, and they didn't play together any more. Sometimes she called me over to play croquet with her, but that was only when her mother and Brick Pollitt had disappeared into the house too early to play the game. Mary Louise had a passion for croquet. She played it purely for itself; it did not have for her any shadowy connotations.

What the game meant to Brick Pollitt calls for some further account of Brick's life before that summer. He had been a celebrated athlete at Sewanee, and had married a New Orleans

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débutante who was a Mardi Gras queen and whose father owned a fleet of banana boats. It had seemed a brilliant marriage, with lots of wealth and prestige on both sides, but only two years later Brick started falling in love with his liquor, and Margaret, his wife, began to be praised for her patience and loyalty to him. Brick seemed to be throwing his life away, as if it were something disgusting that he had suddenly found in his hands. This self-disgust came upon him with the abruptness and violence of a crash on a highway. But what had Brick crashed into? Nothing that anybody was able to surmise, for he seemed to have everything that young men like Brick might hope or desire to have. What else is there? There must have been something that he wanted and lacked, or what reason was there for dropping his life and taking hold of a glass that he never let go of for more than one waking hour?

His wife, Margaret, took hold of Brick's ten-thousand-acre plantation. She had Brick's power of attorney, and she managed all his business affairs with astuteness. "He'll come out of it," she would say. "Brick is passing through something that he'll come out of." She always said the right thing, took the conventionally right attitude, and expressed it to the world which admired her for it. Everybody admired her as a remarkably fine and brave little woman who had much to put up with.

Two sections of an hourglass could not drain and fill more evenly than Brick and Margaret after he took to drink. It was as though she had her lips fastened to some invisible wound in his body through which drained out of him and flowed into her the assurance and vitality that had been his before his marriage. Margaret Pollitt lost her pale, feminine prettiness and assumed in its place something more impressive —a firm and rough-textured sort of handsomeness. Once very pretty but indistinct, a graceful sketch that was done with a very light pencil, she became vivid as Brick disappeared behind the veil of his liquor. She abruptly stopped being quiet and dainty. She was now apt to have dirty fingernails, which she covered with scarlet enamel. When the enamel chipped off, the grey showed underneath. Her hair was now cut short, so that she didn't have to "mess with it." It was wind-blown and full of sparkle; she jerked a comb through it, making it crackle. She had white teeth that were a little too large for her thin lips, and when she threw her head back in laughter, cords stood out in her smooth brown throat. She had a booming

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laugh that she might have stolen from Brick while he was drunk or asleep beside her at night. She had a way of releasing the clutch on a car at the exact instant that her laughter boomed out, and of not calling goodbye but of thrusting one bare, strong arm straight out with the fingers clenched as the car shot off in high gear and disappeared into a cloud of yellow dust. She didn't drive her own little runabout nowadays as much as she did Brick's Pierce-Arrow touring car, for Brick's driver's licence had been revoked. She frequently broke the speed limit on the highway. The patrolmen would stop her, but she had such an affability, such a disarming way with her, that they would have a good laugh together and there would be no question of a ticket.

Somebody in her family died in Memphis that spring, and she went there to attend the funeral and collect her inheritance, and while she was away, Brick Pollitt slipped out from under her thumb a bit.

Another death occurred during her absence. That nice young doctor who took care of Brick when he had to be carried to the hospital took sick in a shocking way. An awful flower grew in his brain, like a fierce geranium—grew and grew and one day shattered its pot. All of a sudden, the wrong words came out of his mouth; he seemed to be speaking in an unknown tongue; he couldn't find things with his hands; he made troubled signs over his forehead. His wife led him about the house by one hand, yet he stumbled and fell flat; the breath was knocked out of him, and he had to be put to bed by his wife and the Negro yardman; and he lay there laughing weakly, incredulously, trying to find his wife's hand with both of his while she looked at him with eyes that she couldn't keep from blazing with terror.

He lived on under drugs for a week, and it was during that time that Brick Pollitt came and sat with Isabel Grey by her dying husband's bed. She couldn't speak; she could only shake her head incessantly, like a metronome, with no lips visible in her white face but two pressed-narrow bands of a dimmer whiteness that shook as if some white liquid flowed beneath them with a rapidity and violence that made them quiver.

"*God,*" was the only word she was able to say, but Brick Pollitt somehow understood what she meant by that word, as if it were in a language that she and he, alone of all people, could speak and understand. And when the dying man's eyes

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opened, as if they were being forced, on something they couldn't bear to look at, it was Brick, his hands suddenly quite sure and steady, who filled the hypodermic needle for her and pumped its contents fiercely into her husband's hard young arm.

And it was over.

There was another bed at the back of the house, and he and Isabel lay beside each other on that bed for a couple of hours before they let the town know that her husband's agony was completed, and the only movement between them was the intermittent, spasmodic digging of their fingernails into each other's clenched palm while their bodies lay stiffly separate, deliberately not touching at any other points, as if they abhorred any other contact with each other.

And so you see what the summer game on the violet-shadowed lawn was—it was a running together out of something unbearably hot and bright into something obscure and cool.

The young widow was left with nothing in the way of material possessions except the house and an electric automobile. By the time Brick's wife, Margaret, had returned from her journey to Memphis, Brick had taken over the various details of the widow's life that a brother or a relative, if she had had one, would have seen to.

For a week or two, people thought it was very kind of him, and then all at once they decided that Brick's reason for kindness was by no means noble. It appeared that the widow was now his mistress, and this was true. It was true in the limited way that most such opinions are true. She was his mistress, but that was not Brick's reason. His reason had something to do with that chaste interlocking of hands their first time together, after the hypodermic. It had to do with those hours, now receding and fading behind them, as all such hours must, but neither of them could have said what it was, aside from that. Neither of them was able to think very clearly. But Brick was able to pull himself together for a while and take command of the young widow's affairs.

The daughter, Mary Louise, was a plump child of twelve. She was my friend that summer. Mary Louise and I caught lightning bugs and put them in jars, and we played croquet when her mother and Brick Pollitt were not inclined to play. It was Mary Louise that summer who taught me how to deal with mosquito bites. She was plagued by mosquitoes and so was I. She warned me that scratching the bites would leave

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scars on my skin, which was as tender as hers. I said that I didn't care. Someday you will, she told me. She carried with her constantly that summer, a lump of ice in a handkerchief. Whenever a mosquito bit her, instead of scratching the bite she rubbed it gently with the handkerchief-wrapped lump of ice until the sting was frozen to numbness. Of course, in five minutes it would come back and have to be frozen again, but eventually it would disappear and leave no scar. Mary Louise's skin, where it was not temporarily mutilated by a mosquito bite or a slight rash that sometimes appeared after she ate strawberry icecream, was ravishingly smooth and tender.

The Greys' house was very run down, but soon after Brick Pollitt started coming over to see the young widow, the house was painted. It was painted so white that it was almost a very pale blue; it had the blue-white glitter of a block of ice in the sun.

In spite of his red hair, Brick Pollitt, too, had a cool appearance, because he was still young and thin, as thin as the widow, and he dressed, as she did, in clothes of light weight and colour. His white shirts looked faintly pink because of his skin underneath them.

Once, I saw him at an upstairs window of the widow's house just a moment before he pulled the shade down. I was in an upstairs room of my house, and I saw that Brick Pollitt was divided into two colours as distinct as two stripes of a flag, the upper part of him, which had been exposed to the sun, almost crimson and the lower part of him white as this piece of paper.

While the widow's house was being repainted, at Brick Pollitt's expense, she and her daughter lived at the Alcazar Hotel, also at Brick's expense. Brick drove in from his plantation every morning to watch the house painters at work. His driving licence had been restored to him, and this was an important step forward in his personal renovation—being able to drive his own car again. He drove with elaborate caution and formality, coming to a dead stop at every cross street in the town, sounding the silver trumpet at every corner, with smiles and bows and great circular gestures of his hands inviting pedestrians to precede him.

But people did not approve of what Brick Pollitt was doing. They sympathised with Margaret, that brave little woman who had to put up with so much. As for Dr. Grey's widow, she had not been very long in the town; the Doctor had married

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her while he was an intern at a big hospital in Baltimore. Nobody had formed a definite opinion of her before the Doctor died, so it was no effort now simply to condemn her, without any qualification, as a common strumpet.

Brick Pollitt, when he talked to the house painters, shouted to them as if they were deaf, so that all the neighbours could hear what he had to say. He was explaining things to the world, especially the matter of his drinking.

"It's something that you can't cut out completely right away," he would yell up at them. "That's the big mistake that most drinkers make—they try to cut it out completely, and you can't do that. You can do it for maybe a month or two months, but all at once you go back on it worse than before you went off it, and then the discouragement is awful—you lose all faith in yourself and just give up. The thing to do, the way to handle the problem is like a bullfighter handles a bull in a ring. Wear it down little by little, get control of it gradually. That's how I'm handling this thing!

"Yep. Now, let's say that you get up wanting a drink in the morning. Say it's ten o'clock, maybe. Well, you say to yourself, 'Just wait half an hour, old boy, and then you can have one.'— Well, at half-past ten you still want that drink and you want it a little bit worse than you did at ten, but you say to yourself, 'Boy, you could do without it half an hour ago, so you can do without it now.' You see, that's how you got to argue about it with yourself, because a drinking man is not one person. A man that drinks is two people, one grabbing the bottle, the other one fighting him off it—not one but two people fighting each other to get control of a bottle. Well, sir. If you can talk yourself out of a drink at ten, you can still talk yourself out of a drink at *half-past* ten! But at *eleven* o'clock the need for the drink is greater.

"Now *here's* the important thing to remember about this struggle. You got to watch those scales, and when they tip too far against your power to resist, you got to give in a little. That's not weakness. *That's strategy!* Because don't forget what I told you. A drinking man is not one person but two, and it's a battle of wits going on between them. And so I say at eleven, 'Well, *have* your drink. *Go on* and *have* it! One drink at eleven won't hurt you!'

"What time is it now? Yep! Eleven... All right, I'm going to have me that one drink. I could do without it, I don't crave it. But the important thing is..."

His voice would tail off as he entered the widow's house.

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He would stay in there longer than it took to have one drink, and when he came out, there would be a change in his voice as definite as a change of weather or season. The strong and vigorous tone would be a bit filmed over.

Then he would usually begin to talk about his wife.

"I don't say my wife Margaret's not an intelligent woman. She is, and both of us know it, but she don't have a good head for property values. Now, you know Dr. Grey, who used to live here before that brain thing killed him. Well, he was my physician, he pulled me through some bad times when I had that liquor problem. I felt I owed him a lot. Now, that was a terrible thing the way he went, but it was terrible for his widow, too; she was left with this house and that electric automobile and that's all, and this house was put up for sale to pay off her debts, and—well, I bought it. I bought it, and now I'm giving it back to her. Now, my wife Margaret, she. And a lot of other folks, too. Don't understand about this... What time is it? Twelve? High noon!... This ice is melted..."

He'd drift back into the house and stay there half an hour, and when he'd come back out, it would be rather shyly, with a sad and uncertain creaking of the screen door pushed by the hand not holding the tall glass. But after resting a little while on the steps, he would resume his talk to the house painters.

"Yes," he would say, as if he had paused only a moment before, "it's the most precious thing that a woman can give to a man—his lost respect for himself—and the meanest thing one human being can do to another human being is take his respect for himself away from him. I... I had it took away from me."

The glass would tilt slowly up and jerkily down, and he'd have to wipe his chin.

"I had it took away from me! I won't tell you how, but maybe, being men about my age, you're able to guess it. That was how. Some of them don't want it. They cut it off. They cut it right off a man, and half the time he don't even know when they cut it off him. Well, I knew it all right. I could feel it being cut off me. Do you know what I mean?... That's right.

"But once in a while there's one—and they don't come often—that wants a man to keep it, and those are the women that God made and put on this earth. The other kind come out of hell, or out of... I. don't know what. I'm talking too

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much. Sure. I know I'm talking too much about private matters. But that's all right. This property is mine. I'm talking on my own property and I don't give a hoot who hears me or what they think! I'm not going to try to fool anybody about it.

"Whatever I do is nothing to be ashamed of.

"I've been through things that I would rather not mention. But I'm coming out of it now, God damn it, yes, I am! I can't take all the credit. And yet I'm proud. I'm goddam proud of myself, because I was in a pitiful condition with that liquor problem of mine, but now the worst is over. I've got it just about licked. That's my car out there and I drove it up here myself. It's no short drive, it's almost a hundred miles, and I drive it each morning and drive it back each night. I've got back my driver's licence, and I fired the man that was working for my wife, looking after our place. I fired that man and not only fired him but gave him a kick in the breeches that made him eat standing up for the next week or two. It wasn't because I thought he was fooling around. It wasn't that. But him and her both took about the same attitude towards me, and I didn't like the attitude they took. They would talk about me right in front of me, as if I wasn't there. 'Is it time for his medicine?' Yes, they were giving me dope! So one day I played possum. I was lying out there on the sofa and she said to him, 'I guess he's passed out now.' And he said, 'Jesus, dead drunk at half-past one in the afternoon!'

"Well. I got up slowly. I wasn't drunk at that hour, I wasn't even half drunk. I stood up straight and walked slowly towards him. I walked straight up to them both, and you should of seen the eyes of them both bug out! 'Yes,' I said, 'at half-past one!' And I grabbed him by his collar and by the seat of his breeches and turkey-trotted him right on out of the house and pitched him on his face in a big mud puddle at the foot of the steps to the front veranda. And as far as I know or care, maybe he's still laying there and she's still screaming, 'Stop, Brick!' But I believe I did hit her. Yes, I did. I did hit her. There's times when you got to hit them, and that was one of those times. I ain't been to the house since.

"I moved in the little place we lived in before the big one was built, on the other side of the bayou, and ain't crossed over there since.

"Well, sir, that's all over with now. I got back my power of attorney which I'd give to that woman and I got back my

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driver's licence and I bought this piece of property in town and signed my own cheque for it and I'm having it completely done over to make it as handsome a piece of residential property as you can find in this town and I'm having that lawn out there prepared for the game of croquet."

Then he'd look at the glass in his hand as if he had just then noticed that he was holding it. He'd give it a look of slightly pained surprise, as if he had cut his hand and just now noticed that it was cut and bleeding. Then he would sigh like an old-time actor in a tragic role. He would put the tall glass down on the balustrade with great, great care, look back at it to make sure that it wasn't going to fall over, and walk, very straight and steady, to the porch steps and, just as steady but with more concentration, down them.

When he arrived at the foot of the steps, he would laugh as if someone had made a comical remark. He would duck his head genially and shout to the house painters something like this: "Well, I'm not making any predictions, because I'm no fortune-teller, but I've got a strong idea that I'm going to lick my liquor problem this summer, ha-ha, I'm going to lick it this summer! I'm not going to take no cure and I'm not going to take no pledge. I'm just going to prove I'm a man again! I'm going to do it step by little step, the way that people play the game of croquet. You know how you play that game. You hit the ball through one wicket and then you drive it through the next one. You hit it through that wicket and then you drive on to another. You go from wicket to wicket, and it's a game of precision—it's a game that takes concentration and precision, and that's what makes it a wonderful game for a drinker.

"It takes a sober man to play a game of precision. It's better than shooting pool, because a pool hall is always next door to a gin mill, and you never see a pool player that don't have his liquor glass on the edge of the table or somewhere pretty near it, and croquet is also a better game than golf, because in golf you've always got that nineteenth hole waiting for you. Nope, for a man with a liquor problem croquet may seem a little bit sissy, but let me tell you it's a game of precision. You go from wicket to wicket until you arrive at that big final pole, and then, bang, you've hit it, the game is finished, you're there! And then, and not until then, you can go up here to the porch and have you a cool gin drink, a julep or a Collins. Hey! Where did I leave that glass? Aw! Yeah, hand it down to me, will you? Ha-ha. Thanks."

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He would take a birdlike sip, make a fiercely wry face, and shake his head violently as if somebody had drenched it with water. "*This damned stuff!*"

He would look around to find a safe place to set the glass down again. He would select a bare spot of earth between the hydrangea bushes and deposit the glass there as carefully as if he were planting a memorial tree, and then he would straighten up with a great air of relief and expand his chest and flex his arms. "Ha-ha, yep, croquet is a summer game for widows and drinkers, ha-ha!"

For a few moments, standing there in the sun, he would seem as sure and powerful as the sun itself, but then some little shadow of uncertainty would touch him again, get through the wall of his liquor; some tricky little shadow of a thought, as sly as a mouse, quick, dark, too sly to be caught, and without his moving enough for it to be noticed his still fine body would fall as violently as a giant tree crashes down beneath a final axe stroke, taking with it all the wheeling seasons of sun and stars, whole centuries of them, crashing suddenly into oblivion and rot.

He would make this enormous fall without a perceptible movement of his body. At the most, it would show in the faint flicker of something across his face, whose colour gave him the name people knew him by. Possibly one knee sagged a little forward. Then slowly, slowly, he would fasten one hand over his belt and raise the other one hesitantly to his head, feel the scalp and the hard round bowl of the skull underneath it, as if he dimly imagined that by feeling that dome he might be able to guess what was hidden inside it—facing now the intricate wickets of the summer to come.

For one reason or another, Mary Louise Grey was locked out of the house a great deal of the time that summer, and since she was a lonely child with little or no imagination, apparently unable to amuse herself with solitary games—except the endless one of copying her mother—the afternoons when she was excluded from the house because her mother had a headache were periods of great affliction.

There were several galleries with outside stairs between them, and she would patrol the galleries and wander forlornly about the lawn or go down the front walk and sit in the glass box of the electric. She would vary her steps, sometimes walking sedately, sometimes skipping, sometimes hopping and humming, one hand always clutching a handkerchief that contained the

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lump of ice. This lump of ice to rub her mosquito bites had to be replaced at frequent intervals.

"Oh, iceman!" the widow would call sweetly from an upstairs window. "Don't forget to leave some extra pieces for little Mary Louise to rub her mosquito bites with!"

From time to time, Mary Louise would utter a soft cry, and, in a voice that had her mother's trick of carrying a great distance without being loud, call, "Oh, Mother, I'm simply being devoured by mosquitoes!"

"Darling," her mother would answer from the upstairs window, "that's dreadful, but you know that Mother can't help it; she didn't create the mosquitoes and she can't destroy them for you!"

"You could let me come in the house, Mama."

"No, I can't let you come in, precious. Not yet."

"Why not, Mother?"

"Because Mother has a sick headache."

"I will be quiet."

"You say that you will, but you won't. You must learn to amuse yourself, precious; you mustn't depend on Mother to amuse you. Nobody can depend on anyone else for ever. I'll tell you what you can do till Mother's headache is better. You can drive the electric out of the garage. You can drive it around the block, but don't go into the business district with it, and then you can stop in the shady part of the drive and sit there perfectly comfortably till Mother feels better and can get dressed and come out. And then I think Mr. Pollitt may come over for another game of croquet. Won't that be lovely?"

"Do you think he will get here in time to play?"

"I hope so, precious. It does him so much good to play croquet."

"Oh, I think it does all of us good to play croquet," Mary Louise would say, in a voice that trembled just at the vision of it.

Before Brick Pollitt arrived—sometimes half an hour before his coming, as though she could hear his automobile on the highway twenty miles from the house—Mary Louise would bound plumply off the gallery and begin setting up the poles and wickets. While she was doing this, her plump little buttocks and her beginning breasts and her shoulder-length copper curls would all bob up and down in unison. I would watch her from our front steps.

She worked feverishly against time, for experience had

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taught her that the sooner she completed the preparations for the game, the greater would be the chance of getting her mother and Mr. Pollitt to play it. Frequently she was not fast enough, or they were too fast for her; by the time she had finished her perspiring job, the veranda would be deserted. Her wailing cries would begin, punctuating the dusk at intervals only a little less frequent than the passing of cars of people going out for evening drives to cool off.

"Mama! Mama! The croquet set is ready!"

Usually there would be a long, long wait for any response to come from the upstairs window towards which the calls were directed. But one time there wasn't. Almost immediately after the wailing voice was lifted, begging for the commencement of the game, Mary Louise's thin, pretty mother showed herself at the window. That was the time when I saw, between the dividing gauze of the bedroom curtains, her naked breasts, small and beautiful, shaken like two angry fists by her violent motion. She leaned between the curtains to answer Mary Louise, not in her usual tone of gentle remonstrance but in a shocking cry of rage: "Oh, be still, for God's sake, you fat little monster!"

Mary Louise was shocked into a silence that must have lasted for a quarter of an hour. It was probably the word "fat" that struck her so overwhelmingly, for Mary Louise had once told me, when we were circling the block in the electric, that her mother had told her that she was *not* fat, that she was only plump, and that these cushions of flesh were going to dissolve in two or three more years and then she would be just as thin and pretty as her mother.

Though Mary Louise would call me over to play croquet with her, she was not at all satisfied with my game. I had had so little practice and she so much, and, besides, it was the company of the grown-up people she wanted. She would call me over only when they had disappeared irretrievably into the lightless house or when the game had collapsed owing to Mr. Brick Pollitt's refusal to take it seriously.

When he played seriously, he was even better at it than Mary Louise, who practised sometimes all afternoon in preparation for a game. But there were evenings when he would not leave his drink on the porch but would carry it down on to the lawn with him and play with one hand, more and more capriciously, while in the other hand he carried a tall glass. Then the lawn would become a great stage on which he performed all the immemorial antics of the clown, to the exasperation of

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Mary Louise and her thin, pretty mother, both of whom would become very severe and dignified on these occasions.

They would retire from the croquet lawn and stand off at a little distance, calling softly, like a pair of complaining doves, both in the same lady-like tones of remonstrance. He was not a middle-aged-looking man—that is, he was not at all big around the middle—and he could leap and run like a boy. He could turn cartwheels and walk on his hands, and sometimes he would grunt and lunge like a wrestler or make long, crouching runs like a football player, weaving in and out among the wickets and painted poles of the croquet lawn.

The acrobatics and sports of his youth seemed to haunt him. He would call out hoarsely to invisible team-mates and adversaries—muffled shouts of defiance and anger and triumph, to which an incongruous counterpoint was continually provided by the faint, cooing voice of the widow: "Brick! Brick! Stop now, please stop! The child is crying! People will think you've gone crazy!" For Mary Louise's mother knew why the lights had gone out on all the screened porches up and down the street and why the automobiles drove past the house at the speed of a funeral procession while Mr. Brick Pollitt was making a circus ring of the croquet lawn.

Late one evening when he was making one of his crazy dashes across the lawn with an imaginary football hugged against his belly, he tripped over a wicket and sprawled on the lawn, and he pretended to be too gravely injured to get back on his feet. His groans brought Mary Louise and her mother running from behind the vine-screened end of the veranda and out upon the lawn to assist him. They took him by the hands and tried to haul him up, but with a sudden shout of laughter he pulled them both down on top of him and held them there till both of them were sobbing. He got up, finally, to replenish his glass of iced gin, and then returned to the lawn.

That evening was a fearfully hot one, and Brick decided to cool and refresh himself with the sprinkler while he enjoyed his drink. He turned it on and pulled it out to the centre of the lawn. There he rolled about on the grass under its leisurely revolving arch of water, and as he rolled about, he began to wriggle out of his clothes. He kicked off his white shoes and one of his pale-green socks, tore off his drenched white shirt and grass-stained linen trousers, but he never succeeded in getting off his necktie.

Finally, he was sprawled, like some grotesque fountain

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figure, in underwear and necktie and the one remaining pale-green sock while the revolving arch of water moved with cool whispers about him. The arch of water had a faint crystalline iridescence, a mist of delicate colours, as it wheeled under the moon, for the moon had by that time begun to poke with an air of slow astonishment over the roof of the little building that housed the electric. And still the complaining doves cooed at him from various windows of the house, and you could tell their voices apart only by the fact that the mother murmured, "Brick? Brick?" and Mary Louise called him Mr. Pollitt.

"Oh, Mr. Pollitt, Mother is so unhappy! Mother is crying!"

That night, he talked to himself or to invisible figures on the lawn. One of them was his wife, Margaret. He kept saying, "I'm sorry, Margaret, I'm sorry, Margaret, I'm so sorry, so sorry, Margaret. I'm sorry I'm no good, I'm sorry, Margaret, I'm so sorry, so sorry I'm no good, sorry I'm drunk, sorry I'm no good, I'm so sorry it all had to turn out like this . . ."

Later on, much later, after the remarkably slow procession of touring cars had stopped passing the house, a little black sedan that belonged to the police drew up in front of the Greys' and sat there for a while.

In it was the chief of police himself. He called "Brick! Brick!" almost as gently and softly as Mary Louise's mother had called from the lightless windows. "Brick! Brick, old boy! Brick, fellow?" he called, till finally the inert fountain figure in underwear and green sock and unremovable necktie staggered out from under the rotating arch of water and stumbled down to the walk and stood there negligently and quietly conversing with the chief of police, under the no longer at all astonished, now quite large and indifferent great yellow stare of the August moon.

They began to laugh softly together, Mr. Brick Pollitt and the chief of police, and finally the door of the little black car opened and Mr. Brick Pollitt got in beside the chief of police while the common officer got out to collect the clothes, flabby as drenched towels, on the croquet lawn. Then they drove away, and the summer night's show was over.

It was not quite over for me, for I had been watching it all that time with unabated interest. And about an hour afterwards I saw Mary Louise's mother come out on to the lawn; she stood there with an air of desolation for quite a while.

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Then she went into the garage and backed the electric out. The electric went sedately off into the summer night, with its buzzing no louder than an insect's, and perhaps an hour later it came back again, containing in its glass show box not only the thin, pretty widow but a quiet and chastened Mr. Pollitt. She curved an arm about his immensely tall figure as they went up the front walk, and I heard him say only one word distinctly. It was the name of his wife.

Early that autumn, which was different from summer in nothing except the quicker coming of dusk, the visits of Mr. Brick Pollitt began to take on a spasmodic irregularity.

That faraway boom of a cannon at five o'clock was now the announcement that two ladies in white dresses were waiting on a white gallery for someone who was each time a little more likely to disappoint them than the time before.

Disappointment was not a thing that Mary Louise was inured to; it was a country that she was passing through not as an old inhabitant but as a bewildered explorer, and each afternoon she lugged the oblong box out of the garage, ceremonially opened it upon the centre of the lawn, and began to arrange the wickets in their formal pattern between the two gaudily painted poles that meant beginning, middle, and end. And the widow talked to her from the gallery, under the awning, as if there had been no important alteration in their lives or their prospects. Their almost duplicate voices as they talked back and forth between gallery and lawn rang out as clearly as if the enormous corner lot were enclosed at this hour by a still more enormous and perfectly transparent glass bell that picked up and carried through space whatever was uttered beneath it.

This was true not only when they were talking to each other across the lawn but when they were seated side by side in the white wicker chairs on the gallery. Phrases from these conversations became catchwords, repeated and mocked by the neighbours, for whom the widow and her daughter and Mr. Brick Pollitt had been three players in a sensational drama.

It had shocked and angered them for two acts, but now as it approached a conclusion it was declining into unintentional farce, which they could laugh at. It was not difficult to find something ludicrous in the talks between the two ladies or the high-pitched elegance of their voices.

Mary Louise would ask, "Will Mr. Pollitt get here in time for croquet?"

"I hope so, precious. It does him so much good."

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"He'll have to come soon or it will be too dark to see the wickets."

"That's true, precious."

"Mother, why is it dark so early now?"

"Honey, you know why. The sun goes South."

"But why does it go South?"

"Precious, Mother cannot explain the movements of the heavenly bodies, you know that as well as Mother knows it. Those things are controlled by certain mysterious laws that people on earth don't know or understand and therefore cannot explain."

"Mother, are we going East?"

"When, precious?"

"Before school starts."

"Honey, you know it's impossible for Mother to make any definite plans."

"I hope we do. I don't want to go to school here."

"Why not, precious? Are you afraid of the children?"

"No, Mother, but they don't like me. They make fun of me."

"How do they make fun of you?"

"They mimic the way I talk and they walk in front of me with their stomachs pushed out and giggle."

"That's because they're children and children are cruel."

"Will they stop being cruel when they grow up?"

"Why, I suppose some of them will and some of them won't."

"Well, I hope we go East before school opens."

"Mother can't make any plans or promises, honey."

"No, but Mr. Brick Pollitt—"

"Honey, lower your voice! Ladies talk softly."

"Oh, my goodness!"

"What is it, precious?"

"A mosquito just bit me!"

"That's too bad, but don't scratch it. Scratching can leave a permanent scar on the skin."

"I'm not scratching it. I'm just sucking it, Mother."

"Honey, Mother has told you time and again that the thing to do when you have a mosquito bite is to get a small piece of ice and wrap it up in a handkerchief and rub the bite gently with it until the sting is removed."

"That's what I do, but my lump of ice is melted!"

"Get you another piece, honey. You know where the ice-box is!"

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"There's not much left. You put so much in the ice-bag for your headache."

"There must be some left, honey."

"There's just enough left for Mr. Pollitt's drinks."

"Never mind that."

"He needs it for his drinks, Mother."

"Yes, Mother knows what he wants the ice for, precious."

"There's only a little piece left. It's hardly enough to rub a mosquito bite with."

"Well, use it for that purpose, that purpose is better, and anyhow when Mr. Pollitt comes over as late as this, he doesn't deserve to have any ice saved for him."

"Mother?"

"Yes, precious?"

"I love ice and sugar!"

"What did you say, precious?"

"I said I loved ice and sugar!"

"Ice and sugar, precious?"

"Yes, I love the ice and sugar in the bottom of Mr. Pollitt's glass when he's through with it."

"Honey, you mustn't eat the ice in the bottom of Mr. Pollitt's glass!"

"Why not, Mother?"

"Because it's got liquor in it!"

"Oh, no, Mother. It's just ice and sugar when Mr. Pollitt's through with it."

"Honey, there's always a little liquor left in it."

"Oh, no. Not a drop's left when Mr. Pollitt's through with it!"

"But you say there's sugar left in it, and, honey, you know that sugar is very absorbent."

"It's what, Mummy?"

"It absorbs some liquor, and that's a good way to cultivate a taste for it. And, honey, you know what dreadful consequences a taste of liquor can have. It's bad enough for a man, but for a woman it's fatal. So when you want ice and sugar, let Mother know and she'll prepare some for you, but don't ever let me catch you eating what's left in Mr. Pollitt's glass!"

"Mama?"

"Yes, precious?"

"It's almost completely dark now. Everybody is turning on their lights or driving out on the river road to cool off. Can't we go out riding in the electric?"

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"No, honey, we can't till we know Mr. Pollitt's not—"

"Do you still think he will come?"

"Precious, how can I say? Is Mother supposed to be a fortune-teller?"

"*Oh, here comes the Pierce, Mummy, here comes the Pierce!*"

"*Is it? Is it the Pierce?*"

"Oh, no. No, it isn't. It's a Hudson Super Six. Mummy, I'm going to pull up the wickets now and water the lawn, because if Mr. Pollitt does come, he'll have people with him or won't be in a condition to play croquet. And when I've finished, I want to drive the electric around the block."

"Drive it around the block, honey, but don't go into the business district with it."

"Are you going with me, Mummy?"

"No, precious, I'm going to sit here."

"It's cooler in the electric."

"I don't think so. The electric goes too slowly to make much breeze."

If Mr. Pollitt did finally arrive those evenings, it was likely to be with a caravan of cars that came from Memphis, and then Mrs. Grey would have to receive a raffish assortment of strangers as if she herself had invited them to a party.

The party would not confine itself to the downstairs rooms and galleries but would explode quickly and brilliantly in all directions, filling both floors of the house, spilling out upon the lawn, and sometimes even penetrating the little building that housed the electric automobile and the oblong box that held the packed-away croquet set.

On those party nights, the fantastically balustraded and gabled and turreted white building would glitter all over, like one of those huge night-excursion boats that came downriver from Memphis, and it would be full of ragtime music and laughter. But at some point in the evening there would be, almost invariably, a disturbance. Some male guest would start cursing loudly, a woman would scream, you would hear a shattering of glass. Almost immediately afterwards, the lights would go out in the house, as if it really were a boat and had run aground.

From all the doors and galleries and stairs, people would come rushing forth, and the dispersion would be more rapid than the arrival had been.

A little while later, the police car would pull up in front of the house. The thin, pretty widow would come out on the

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front gallery to receive the chief of police, and you could hear her light voice tinkling like glass chimes. "Why, it was nothing, it was nothing at all, just somebody who drank a little too much and lost his temper. You know how that Memphis crowd is, Mr. Duggan, there's always one gentleman in it who can't hold his liquor. I know it's late, but we have such a huge lawn—it occupies half the block—that I shouldn't think anybody who wasn't overcome with curiosity would have to know that a party had been going on!"

And then something happened that made no sound at all.

It wasn't an actual death, but it had nearly all the external indications of one. When there is a death in a house, the house is unnaturally quiet for a day or two. During that interval, the space that separates a house from those who watch it seems to become a translucent thickness of glass behind which whatever activity is visible goes on with the startling hush of a film when the sound track is broken. So it had been five months ago, when the pleasant young Doctor had died of that fierce flower grown in his skull. There had been an unnatural quiet for several days, and then a peculiar grey car with frosted windows had crashed through the bell of silence and the young Doctor, identifiable by the bronze gleam of hair at one end of the strapped and sheeted figure on the cot, had emerged from the house as if he were giving a public demonstration of how to go to sleep soundly in jolting motion under a glaze of lights.

That was five months ago, and it was now early October.

Mr. Pollitt had not been seen at the Greys' for more than a week when, one day, a truck pulled up before the house and a workman planted a square wooden sign at the front of the lawn. Mrs. Grey came out of the house as if it had caught fire. She ran down the steps, her white skirts making the crackling noise of flame, calling out as she descended, "You, man! What are you doing! What are you putting up there!"

"A 'For Sale' sign," he told her.

"Who told you to put that up? This house isn't for sale!"

"Yes, ma'am, it is!"

"Who said so?"

"Mrs. Pollitt, *she* said so."

He stared at Mrs. Grey and she came no closer. Then he gave the pole of the red-lettered sign a final blow with the back of a shovel and tossed the implement crashing into the truck and drove off. The back of the sign said nothing, so presently

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Mrs. Grey continued her running advance to the front of the lawn, where the great red letters were visible. She stood in front of it, rapidly shaking her head, finally gasping aloud as if the import of it had just then struck her, and then she turned and went slowly and thoughtfully back to the radiant fantasy of a house just as Mary Louise appeared from behind it with the hose.

"Mother!" she called, "I'm going to water the lawn!"

"*Don't!*" said Mrs. Grey.

The next afternoon, a fat and pleasantly smiling man, whom I had seen times without number loitering around in front of the used-car lot next to the Paramount movie, came up the front walk of the Greys' house with the excessive nonchalance of a man who is about to commit a robbery.

He pushed the bell, waited awhile, pushed it again, and then was admitted through an opening that seemed to be hardly wide enough for his figure. He came back out almost immediately with something in his closed fist. It was the key to the little building that contained the croquet set and the electric automobile. He drew its folding doors all the way open, and disclosed the electric sitting there with its usual manner of a lady putting on or taking off her gloves at the entrance to a reception. He stared at it, as if its elegance were momentarily baffling. Then he got in and drove it out of the garage, holding the polished black pilot stick with a look on his round face that was like the look of an adult who is a little embarrassed to find himself being amused by a game that was meant for children.

He drove it serenely out into the wide, shady street, and at an upstairs window of the house there was some kind of quick movement, as if a figure looking out had been startled by something and then had retreated in haste.

Later, after the Greys had left town, I saw the elegant square vehicle, which appeared to be made out of glass and patent leather, standing with an air of haughty self-consciousness among a dozen or so other cars for sale in the lot next door to the Paramount movie theatre, and as far as I know, it may be still sitting there, but many degrees less glittering by now.

The Greys had come and gone all in one quick season: the young Doctor, with his understanding eyes and quiet voice, whom everyone had liked in a hesitant, early way and had said would do well in the town; the thin, pretty woman, whom no-one had really known except Brick Pollitt; and the plump little girl, who might someday be as pretty and slender as her

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mother. They had come and gone in one season, yes, like one of these tent shows that suddenly appear in a vacant lot in a Southern town and cross the sky at night with mysteriously wheeling lights and unearthly music, and then are gone, and the summer goes on without them, as if they had never come there.

As for Mr. Brick Pollitt, I can remember seeing him only once after the Greys left town, for my time there was also coming to an end.

This last time I saw him was a brilliant autumn morning. It was a Saturday morning in October. Brick's driver's licence had been revoked again, and his wife, Margaret, sat in the driver's seat of the Pierce-Arrow touring car. Brick did not sit beside her. He was on the back seat of the car, pitching this way and that way with the car's jolting motion, like a loosely-wrapped package being delivered somewhere. Margaret Pollitt handled the car with a wonderful male assurance, her bare arms brown and muscular, and the car's canvas top had been lowered, the better to expose on its back seat the sheepishly grinning and nodding figure of Brick Pollitt.

He was immaculately clothed and barbered. The knot of his polka-dot tie was drawn as tight as strong and eager fingers could knot a tie for an important occasion. One of his large red hands protruded, clasping the door to steady his motion, and two bands of gold glittered, a small one about a finger, a large one about the wrist. His cream-coloured coat was neatly folded on the seat beside him and he wore a shirt of thin white material.

He was a man who had been, and even at that time still was, the handsomest you were likely to remember.

Margaret blew the car's silver trumpet at every intersection. She leaned this way and that way, elevating or thrusting out an arm as she greeted people on porches, merchants beside store entrances, people she barely knew along the walks, calling them all by their familiar names, as if she were running for office in the town, while Brick nodded and grinned with senseless amiability behind her.

It was exactly the way that some ancient conqueror, such as Caesar, or Alexander the Great, or Hannibal, might have led in chains through a capital city the prince of a state newly conquered.

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"*Three Players of a Summer Game*" *appears in a soon-to-be-published anthology*, "50 *Best American Stories*"

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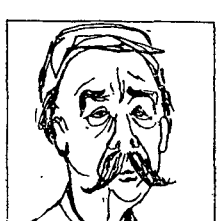
by **E. L. MALPASS**

Dr. Forrester's CASEBOOK



ALWAYS ready to extend a helping hand to anyone descending from a first-class carriage, was Mog the Luggage. Now he hurried forward, through the steamy murk of Dinas Junction, to where the London train had just come to a panting halt.

"Arrived from the vast metropolis, is it?" he inquired affably of the young man who had just succeeded in getting a heavy suitcase off the rack and on to the platform outside a first-class compartment.

The young man spun round nervously. He gazed at Mog through thick, horn-rimmed glasses. "D—do you think you could get me a taxi?" he asked.

Pursed his lips, did Mog. Cogitated. Then, at last: "Wouldn't care to recommend it," he said frankly.

Startled, the young man looked. "What *do* you mean?"

"Only thinking of your safety. Turned a deaf ear to the maxim, 'If you drink, don't drive,' Tommos the Taxi has."

"You mean he—?"

"Yes. Well, see his point, can't you." Mog settled his elbow more comfortably on the handle of his trolley. "Damn silly he says, telling a man not to drive when 'tis his very livelihood."

"But—but that's ridiculous. You'll have to bring my case on your trolley, then."

"Not allowed to leave the station, me." Very firm on that point, Mog was.

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The rain dripped mournfully through the station roof. The train looked as though it would have liked to give itself a good shake.

The young man gazed at the scene and shuddered. A heavy case. Drenching rain. The amiable but entirely negative attitude of Mog the Luggage. No wonder he felt the numbing onset of despair and frustration that so often afflicts the Englishman first setting foot on foreign soil. He decided to approach the problem from another angle. "How far is it to Dr. Ifor Owen's?"

The rather detached interest Mog had been showing in the question of transport fell away; to be replaced by a keen personal interest. "Dr. Ifor Owen's? Not the local tenant, are you?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm Dr. Forrester. I'm taking over while Dr. Ifor Owen goes on holiday."

Mog said, friendly as you please, "A bit young, isn't it?"

Now Jeremy Forrester always feared, and not without reason, that he was a weak character. And like most weak characters he was inclined to make a show of strength to the wrong people at the wrong time. Now he snapped, "Mind your own business, and do something about this luggage."

Well, no way to speak to a Welshman on his native soil, was it. Mog said coldly, "Uncle Ephraim *might* co-operate; but he would need to be approached civil."

Jeremy Forrester knew he had gone too far. If his luggage were ever going to leave this spot, he'd better keep a civil tongue in his head. "And where do we find Uncle Ephraim?" he inquired in honeyed tones.

Without a word Mog stumped off to the lamp room, dudgeon in every step. He returned. Behind him shambled an aged creature who looked as though a light attaché case would have been his limit even in the flush of youth.

They fell in before Dr. Forrester, who addressed himself to the ancient.

"Could you carry my case to Dr. Ifor Owen's?"

Silence. It was quite clear that, as an exercise in communication, his speech had failed. He tried again. Silence.

"Deaf as a post, the old gentleman is," Mog said, cold as ice.

Jeremy Forrester bellowed his question a third, a fourth time. Two faded blue eyes gazed at him uncomprehendingly.

Then, at last: "Welsh speaking, my Uncle Ephraim," Mog said.

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"Then why couldn't you—?" He caught the glint in Mog's eye and changed to, "—could you explain to him, please?"

Mog explained. The old one picked up the case and set off. Jeremy Forrester made to follow.

But: "Glad to have been of service," said a reproving voice.

"Oh. Ah. Yes." He produced a half-crown, slipped it into an expectant hand. But he had an uneasy feeling that he had not been forgiven, half-crown or no half-crown.

Nor had he. Oh, heaven help all poor travellers who fall foul of Mog the Luggage. Related to everyone in Dinas, Mog is. See him now, addressing his sisters and his cousins and his aunts in the lamp room, whither they have been summoned by jungle telegraph.

"Oh, a nice gentleman the local tenant," Mog is saying. "But shouldn't like to think of Dr. Ifor Owen making him his assistant. Very difficult it might be for a London gentleman to adapt himself to our local ways."

His cousin, Mrs. Evans Balaclava Terrace, looked very understanding. "Wouldn't like the embarrassment of seeing a London gentleman behaving like a fish out of water," she said.

"Might be better for all concerned to have someone local," said his aunt, Mrs. Evans Light Brigade Cottages.

"That is what *I* am thinking," said Mog.

There was a silence. Mog waited. He did not wait in vain.

"Always fancied your nephew Dai for the post, personally," said his Auntie Blodwen.

So had Mog. But the delicacy of his nature would never have let him say so. Surprised, he looked. "Well, *there* is an idea," he said. "A clever lad, Dai, borne on a wave of scholarships all the way from Inkerman Row to the practice of medicine."

"Very convenient it would be to have one of the family on hand, with all the benefits of the National Health Service at his beck and call," said Mrs. Evans Balaclava Terrace.

"Yes, indeed." Stroked his chin, did Mog. "Might be a good thing if Dr. Forrester's tenure of office were not an unqualified success. Wouldn't want Dr. Ifor Owen to saddle himself with someone not altogether suitable, would we, Auntie *bach?*"

In addition to being aged, frail and deaf as a post, Uncle

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Ephraim was now soaked to the skin. Dr. Forrester looked at him with compassion. How was he, brought up in the comparatively innocent world of London, how was he to know that the palsied hands, the bowed shoulders, the thin sodden jacket were all carefully designed to activate the guilt complex of the visiting Anglo Saxon? He pressed a ten-shilling note into the old man's hand. "Buy yourself a drink," he said. Then he ran up the steps and knocked at Dr. Ifor Owen's front door.

It was opened by a middle-aged gentleman in plus-fours and a tweed hat festooned with salmon flies. "Nearly given you up," he said. "Train late?"

"No. I had a bit of trouble about my luggage."

"Did you now?" Two very shrewd Welsh eyes looked at him closely. "Not been putting their backs up already, have you? Because *I* know someone who didn't play his cards right and his luggage never *was* shifted. Had to go back to London eventually, poor devil."

"But you shouldn't *need* to play your cards right. Dash it. It's their *job*."

"You'll learn," Dr. Ifor Owen said briefly. "Now," he went on, "the sodium bicarb's in the tobacco jar and the whisky's in the distilled-water bottle. Oh, and watch the car. Delayed action in the steering. Always turn about ten yards before you get to the corner."

He made for the door.

"You're—you're not *going*?" cried Dr. Forrester.

"Miss my train if I don't." His hand was on the door handle.

"But—you haven't put me in the picture. I don't know a thing about the practice. Case histories—"

"Oh, no need to worry about things like that, boy. *They'll* tell you what's wrong with them. *And* what to prescribe."

Horrified beyond belief, Dr. Forrester was. "But you can't run a practice like that!"

"No?" Dr. Ifor Owen's stare was far from friendly. "Well, I've been doing it for forty years. *And* no complaints." He opened the door. "Now don't you go upsetting them, mind." And he was gone.

The clatter of his shoes down the steps was the most desolate sound Jeremy Forrester had ever heard. He had never felt so lonely in his life. Here he was, in charge of several thousand vulnerable and mortal creatures who might, in the next three weeks, produce everything from broken legs to babies to a

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major epidemic. And all he knew was that you began to turn the car ten yards before you reached the corner.

Desperately he searched for some notes, some information to help him. But the nearest thing to a case history he found was, *Willie Evans, Measles?* scrawled on the back of an envelope. And a fat lot of help that was. Then he remembered that Dr. Ifor Owen had, in his brief correspondence, mentioned a housekeeper, and his spirits rose. All he'd got to do, he felt sure now, was to ring that bell and summon her—the motherly, apple-cheeked creature who would take him under her wing, who would cook him wonderful dinners of Welsh leg of lamb, who even, no doubt, knew rather more about the practice and the patients than did Dr. Ifor Owen—and who would be only too pleased to pass on her knowledge and her wisdom, once she had taken Jeremy Forrester to her mother's heart.

He rang the bell.

The door opened. Cerigwen stood in the doorway.

Cerigwen looked about twelve. She gazed at Jeremy Forrester with delight. "Oh, there is young," she cried, rapt.

He ignored this. "Ask the housekeeper to come in, will you?"

"And who do you think I am, then?"

"You—you're not the housekeeper!"

She nodded, pert. Oh, it was too ridiculous. "How old are you? Twelve?" he asked, unkindly.

"Seventeen next. And not so old yourself, I am thinking. Didn't Uncle tell you about me?"

"Uncle?"

"Dr. Ifor Owen's niece Cerigwen, me. And going to keep house for you, but out of the door every night at eight sharp slamming it for the street to hear, don't want tongues wagging, do we now?"

He sighed. "I'd hoped there might be someone who could give me some information about the practice."

She came and perched on the arm of his chair. "What you want to know, boyo?"

"Everything. Where your Uncle keeps his notes, where—"

"Oh, not one for keeping notes, Uncle. But *I* can tell you what is wrong with most of them." Absentmindedly she began to curl a lock of his dark hair about her little finger. "You want me to sit in with you at your first surgery?"

Jeremy Forrester was outraged. "Certainly not. It would be most improper."

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"Have it your own way," she said cheerfully. She settled a little closer. "Did Uncle tell you he was thinking of taking an assistant?"

He shifted uncomfortably. A soft thigh was too close to his shoulder for his peace of mind. "He told me *nothing*," he said angrily.

"Agog for his fishing holiday, no doubt," she said understandingly. "Be nice if he got an assistant like you."

"Nice who for?" Dr. Forrester asked rudely and ungrammatically.

"Me," she said blandly. "Somewhat starved of intellectual companionship, I am."

Jeremy Forrester said, "From what I've seen of Dinas, I'd rather practise medicine in the upper reaches of the Amazon."

"Well, there is unkind."

"Oh, I don't mean you. But—well, look at the weather, for instance. Is it *always* as wet as this?"

"No. A lovely day we had last Thursday, hardly a spot."

She was edging even closer. He stood up. "When's surgery?"

"Five-thirty to seven. Always a big one on Mondays, too. All weekend they've had to think up something new. Plus, of course, those who are just coming out of interest."

"Interest?"

"Well, got a bit used to Uncle, they have, after forty years. Be a little treat for them to have someone fresh to look at." She smiled at him as though it were a little treat for her, too.

Five-thirty. Jeremy Forrester sat alone in the surgery. From the waiting-room came the murmur of many patients—dark, devious-minded little Welshmen, he thought, and their dark, tight-lipped, unsmiling women: creatures almost as strange and inscrutable to him as Chinese. And he already had a feeling, he didn't quite know why, that Dr. Ifor Owen had been a bit easy-going with them...

He sighed, took a deep breath, and pinged his bell.

But it was no stranger who entered. It was his old friend Mog the Luggage, washed, combed and beaming. Quite obviously, so far as Mog was concerned, bygones were bygones.

"Evening, Doctor. No need to keep you. Just called for some tablets for my back."

"What's wrong with your back?"

"Oh, nothing, Doctor. Right as rain it is."

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"Then you don't need tablets," Dr. Forrester said with unbelievable patience.

"Ah!" Mog smiled triumphantly. "Now that is where you are wrong. Uncle Ephraim takes them for his legs. Work wonders with Uncle Ephraim's legs, those tablets do, you know."

Patience, Dr. Forrester told himself. He said, "You did, once, have a bad back. Yes?"

Mog nodded. "And Dr. Ifor Owen gave me these tablets, see, didn't do a damn thing."

"So?"

"So I bought some horse liniment from Price the Provisions, very efficacious."

"And you gave the tablets to Uncle. For his legs. And he's been taking them ever since. May I ask how long," he went on, "how long Dr. Ifor Owen has been prescribing these tablets?"

"About five years."

"Oh, God," said Dr. Forrester. He pulled himself together. He said sternly, "Now listen to me. If your Uncle Ephraim wants me to treat his legs he must come and see me."

"Bearing in mind that he is stone deaf, and Welsh-speaking to boot?"

Dr. Forrester swallowed. "Yes," he said bravely.

"Well, there is high-handed," said Mog.

"Will you send in the next patient, please?"

Mog rose. "Seems a pity to disrupt an arrangement that has worked satisfactorily for one and all." He departed, muttering.

Truculent from the start, the next patient was. Mrs. Evans Light Brigade Cottages. Sat foursquare, hatchet-faced, her handbag tight against her stomach, her hands folded tightly across her handbag. Didn't hold with doctors under forty-five. Wasn't decent. Said so flat. Didn't want much, either. Only some brandy to settle her stomach after meals.

"But I can't prescribe brandy. The National Health—"

She didn't know anything about that. All she knew was that Dr. Ifor Owen had been prescribing it for years. But then, she might have known. Mog, her nephew, hadn't taken to Dr. Forrester. And when it came to judging character, Mog was a dab hand.

All vinegar and curlers, the next visitor was. Dr. Forrester eyed her apprehensively, wondering what problem *she* was going to pull out of the bag.

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"Name, please?" he asked, sounding braver than he felt.

"Mrs. Evans Inkerman Row."

"And what can I do for you?"

"'Tis my Cadwallader. Cough, cough, cough, you wouldn't believe."

"Bring him to the surgery, and I'll prescribe for him."

"Can't do that, Doctor. Staying with his Auntie in Llangrwl, see, but Evans the Bus will take the medicine. A relation by marriage, Evans the Bus is," she added proudly.

Jeremy Forrester said, "Mrs. Evans, I will *not* prescribe for a patient I have not seen."

Give her her due, Mrs. Evans saw his point. "I can show you just how he coughs, Doctor." She coughed horribly, sounding rather like Mimi in the last act of *La Bohème*.

Unmoved, the doctor was. Mrs. Evans departed empty-handed and seething. The surgery went dreadfully on.

But time and the hour, as the Bard remarked in one of his more optimistic moments, runs through the roughest day. At last Dr. Forrester rang his bell and no-one came. He opened the door into the waiting-room. It was empty, except for one formidable figure fast asleep in a chair. Dr. Forrester coughed. The figure opened his eyes, blinked. "You're not Dr. Ifor Owen," he said accusingly.

"Dr. Ifor Owen is on holiday. I've taken his place."

"Wouldn't have thought you were old enough. Got all your letters?"

"Despite all appearances, I am a fully-qualified medical practitioner. Now what can I do for you?"

"Want you to come and look at my Betsi, Doctor. Expecting again, I shouldn't wonder."

"I'll call in the morning. Er—did you say your wife?"

"Wife be damned. 'Tis the old sow."

It was the end. All the pent-up frustrations of the last two hours exploded. "How *dare* you? I've not come all the way from London to treat sows!"

"Oh, London, is it?" The farmer looked disgusted. "Don't suppose you *would* know much about animals, then."

"It's not a case of not knowing. I—"

"Wouldn't trust Betsi to a London chap, anyway. A very valuable sow, she is." He made for the door. "Have a few words to say to Ifor, I shall, bringing in an inexperienced young chap—" He was gone.

Cerigwen was smiling at him across the white tablecloth.

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She really was a lovely creature. And she wasn't just a pretty face. The gammon rashers, the fried eggs, the good strong tea—they were just what a man needed after his recent ordeal. Even so, she scared him. She was a young lady who knew just where she was going—*and* who with. Even the smooth, friendly knee touching his under the table seemed faintly possessive.

"In a good mood, Uncle will be after his holiday," she said. "Tell him you want to be his assistant before he gets his boots off."

He said bitterly, "If the next three weeks are anything like tonight, he's not going to need an assistant. Because he won't have any patients."

She looked at him anxiously. "Not been upsetting them, have you?"

"I imagine that most of them are already signing on with a Dr. Llewellyn-Roberts."

She looked distressed. "Daggers drawn, he and Uncle are. Blow his top over this, Uncle will, and no mistake."

"Yes," said Jeremy Forrester. Suddenly he didn't want any more ham and eggs. The thought of what was going to happen in three weeks' time had quite taken his appetite.

Running to catch a train he was, up to the knees in treacle. He floundered on. Now a bell was ringing. The train was about to start! Then, suddenly, he was awake, discovering that he was in darkest Wales, that it was twelve-ten in the morning, and that the telephone was ringing. He groped for, found the receiver.

"Dr. Forrester," he said, trying damned hard to sound calm, capable, even awake.

"Oh, Doctor," said a reproving voice. "What you give Uncle that ten bob for? Fighting drunk, he is. Can't do a thing with him."

Dr. Forrester heaved himself up on an elbow. He was still festooned with shreds of sleep and nightmare. "Have you," he asked bitterly, "called me up at midnight just to tell me that?"

Solicitous, Mog sounded. "Not got you out of bed I hope, Doctor?"

"Yes you have."

"Well, there is unfortunate. Still, not much trouble in that case to slip on your trousers and pop round for a word with Uncle. More likely to listen to a gentleman of education like yourself, Uncle is."

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Dr. Forrester floundered angrily in his bed like a hippo in the ooze. "Don't be ridiculous, man. You said yourself he only understands Welsh."

"Standing and authority have no need of words," Mog said, very sententious.

"I am not coming."

"Thought you might feel some sense of responsibility. After all, 'twas your ten bob. 'Buy yourself a drink,' you said."

Jeremy Forrester had a fleeting vision of Mog on Judgment Day, holding up the queue by settling down for a friendly altercation.

"Now listen," the doctor said. "The sooner the people of this town learn that it is not part of a doctor's duties to supply them with brandy, to provide ante-natal care in the piggery, and to put drunks to bed, the—the better."

"Thought you might have cared to take a look at his legs at the same time," said Mog, unmoved.

Dr. Forrester put down the receiver. But Mog had murdered sleep all right. And Forrester was still awake at three-thirty when the Cottage Hospital telephoned to say that Uncle Ephraim had fallen on the bread knife, like an ancient Roman on his sword, and given himself a nasty flesh wound. And very reproachful they sounded, too. This would never have happened, they hinted, had Dr. Ifor Owen been in command.

"Well, my boy, killed them all off, is it?" asked Dr. Ifor Owen, very jocular.

"Er—not exactly," said Jeremy Forrester.

Gave him a startled look, did Dr. Ifor Owen. "What do you mean—not exactly?"

"I mean that a certain splinter group—detached itself from the main body as it were—and—"

"What the devil," asked Dr. Ifor Owen, "are you trying to say?"

Jeremy Forrester swallowed.

"I mean a lot of them have gone over to Dr. Llewellyn-Roberts," he said in a small voice.

Oh, terrible the silence was. Then Dr. Ifor Owen laughed, very mirthless and bitter. "And to think," he said, "to think that I'd been toying with the idea of making you my assistant."

Rain dripped mournfully into the puddles on Number

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Four Platform. The London train simmered gently. Jeremy Forrester hoisted his case on to the rack and sank into a corner seat.

"Wanting a hand with your luggage, is it?" asked a friendly voice.

"I've done it," said Jeremy Forrester.

"Oh, there is a pity. Anxious to give you a hand, I was."

"Thanks."

"'Tisn't right, an educated gentleman having to hump his own cases. Only sorry I was too late to help."

"Don't let it worry you."

Mog came and rested his elbows on the carriage window. "The thought was there," he said.

For three whole weeks Dr. Forrester had made a show of strength. And where had it got him? Had he behaved according to his real nature, abandoned his principles, been thoroughly weak, he'd perhaps be an assistant now, instead of going wearily off to another locum. So the hell with being strong. He groped in his pocket, pulled out half a crown. "Thank you," he said courteously. "I appreciate the thought."

"Well, there is generous," cried Mog in delighted surprise. He went off with his little trolley, eager to find other travellers to whom he could bring help and comfort.

Jeremy Forrester looked at his watch. Three minutes to go. Well, there was one thing about his hurried and ignominious departure. By the time young Cerigwen discovered he was missing, the train, with him in it, should be safe in the sanity and civilisation of the Home Counties.

And this was a good thing. A child of the mists and mountains had no place in the sedate and ordered career that Jeremy Forrester hoped to carve for himself. Yet he was so weak, and she was so determined—and, he admitted, so desirable—that he was not at all sure that he would have had the strength to escape from her. He sighed with relief. Two minutes to go. One minute...

There was the clatter of high heels along the platform. Thirty seconds, fifteen. Zero. Somewhere a whistle blew. The door was flung open. Cerigwen, complete with suitcase, fell into his lap. She gave him her dazzling smile.

"Well, there is fortunate," she panted. "Going to stay with my Gran in Maida Vale." She sat down beside him, very close. She squeezed his hand. "Be company for the journey, isn't it, Jerry *bach*."

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by CONRAD AIKEN

A SEIZURE OF LIMERICKS

1

Said a scion of Boston society
who was pinched, and for mere inebriety,
"I will lie in this gutter
refusing to utter
one word in defence of sobriety."

2

It's time to make love: douse the glim.
The fireflies twinkle and dim.
The stars lean together
like birds of a feather
and the loin lies down with the limb.

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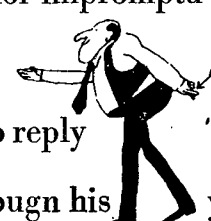
3

Said a dreadfully literate cat
"I've had my Litt. D and all that.
And in New York, my dear,
when I read 'Litter Here,'
why I litter at once and then scat."

4

There was an old micky named Cassidy
who was famed for impromptu mendacity.
When asked did he lie
he replied: to reply
would be to impugn his veracity.



◆ **Conrad Aiken is one of America's most distinguished men of letters. Winner of both the Pulitzer and Bollingen prizes for his poetry, he is also a novelist and essayist of note. But it is through his limericks that Conrad Aiken projects a characteristically zany view of life and where also, his brilliant wit deals deftly with any subject from sex to religion**

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Ray Bradbury

Mythology of the future is always believable when written by the incomparable Ray Bradbury. One of the author's own favourites is *Abyss*—a story of strange power

abyss

UNDER a pale April sky in a faint wind that blew out of a memory of winter, the old man shuffled into the almost empty park at noon. His slow feet were bandaged with nicotine-stained swathes, his hair was wild, long, and grey as was his beard which enclosed a mouth which seemed always a-tremble with revelation.

Now he gazed back as if he had lost so many things he could not begin to guess there in the tumbled ruin, the toothless skyline of the city. Finding nothing, he shuffled on until he found a bench where sat a woman alone. Examining her, he nodded and sat at the far end of the bench and did not look at her again.

He remained, eyes shut, mouth working, for three minutes, head moving as if his nose were printing a single word on the air. Once written, he opened his mouth to pronounce it in a clear, fine voice.

"Coffee."

The woman gasped and stiffened.

The old man's gnarled fingers tumbled in pantomine on his unseen lap.

"Twist the key! Bright red, yellow-letter can! Compressed air. Hisss! Vacuum packed. Ssst! Like a snake!"

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The woman snapped her head about as if slapped, to stare in dreadful fascination at the old man's moving tongue.

"The scent, the odour, the smell. Rich, dark, wondrous — Brazilian beans, fresh ground!"

Leaping up, reeling as if gunshot, the woman tottered.

The old man flicked his eyes wide. "No! I—"

But she was running, gone.

The old man sighed and walked on through the park until he reached a bench where sat a young man completely involved with wrapping dried grass in a small square of thin tissue-paper. His thin fingers shaped the grass tenderly, in an almost holy ritual, trembling as he rolled the tube, put it to his mouth and, hypnotically, lit it. He leaned back, squinting deliciously, communing with the strange rank air in his mouth and lungs.

The old man watched the smoke blow away on the noon wind and said, "Ah, tobacco."

The young man gripped his knees, tight.

The old man, not looking at him went on. "There were the names. And white, red, amber packets, grass-green, sky-blue, pure gold with the red slick small ribbon that ran round the top that you pulled to zip away the crinkly Cellophane—"

"Shut up," said the young man.

"Buy them in stations, subways—"

"Shut up!"

"Gently," said the old man. "It's just that smoke of yours made me think—"

"Don't think!" The young man jerked so violently his homemade cigarette fell in chaff to his lap. "Now look what you made me do!"

"I'm sorry. It was such a nice friendly day—"

"I'm no friend!"

"We're all friends now, or why live?"

"Friends?" the young man snorted, aimlessly plucking at the shredded grass and paper. "Maybe there were 'friends' back in 1970, but now—"

"1970. You must have been a baby then. They still had butterfingers then in bright yellow wrappers. Nice—"

"It was never nice."

The young man stood suddenly. "What's wrong with you?"

"I remember limes and lemons, that's what's wrong with me. Do you remember oranges?"

"Damn right. Oranges, hell! You calling me a liar?

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You want me to feel bad? You nuts? Don't you know the law? You know I could turn you in, you?"

"I know, I know," said the old man, shrugging. "The weather fooled me. It made me want to compare—"

"Compare rumours, that's what they'd say, the police, the special cops, they'd say it, rumours, you trouble-making bastard, you—"

He seized the old man's lapels which ripped so he had to grab another handful, yelling down into his face:

"Why don't I just blast the living daylights out of you. I ain't hurt no-one in so long, I—"

He shoved the old man. Which gave him the idea to pummel, and when he pummelled he began to punch, and punching made it easy to strike, and soon he rained blows upon the old man who stood like one caught in thunder and downpoured storm, using only his fingers to ward off the blows that fleshed his cheeks, shoulders, his brow, his chin, as the young man shrieked cigarettes, moaned toffee, yelled smokes, cried sweets until the old man fell to be kick-rolled and shivering.

The young man stopped and began to cry.

At the sound, the old man, cuddled, clenched into his pain, took his fingers away from his broken mouth and opened his eyes to gaze with astonishment at his assailant.

The young man wept.

"Please..." begged the old man.

The young man wept louder, tears falling fast from his eyes.

"Don't cry," said the old man. "We won't be hungry for ever. We'll rebuild the cities. Listen, I didn't mean you to cry, only to think where are we going, what are we doing, what've we done? You weren't hitting me. You meant to hit something else, but I was handy. Look, I'm sitting up. I'm okay."

The young man stopped crying and blinked down at the old man who forced a bloody smile.

"You—you can't go around," said the young man, "making people unhappy. I'll find someone to fix you!"

"Wait!" The old man struggled to his knees. "No! Wait!"

But the young man ran wildly off out of the park, yelling.

Crouched alone, the old man felt his bones, found one of his teeth lying red among the strewn gravel, handled it sadly.

"Fool," said a voice.

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The old man glanced over and up.

A lean man of some forty years stood leaning against a tree nearby, a look of pale weariness and curiosity on his long face.

"Fool," he said again.

The old man gasped. "You were there, all the time, and did *nothing*?"

"What, fight one fool to save another? No."

The stranger helped him up and brushed him off. "I do my fighting where it pays. Come on. You're going home with me."

The old man gasped again. "Why?"

"That boy'll be back with the police any second. I don't want you stolen away, you're a very precious commodity. I've heard of you, looked for you for days now. Good grief, and when I find you, you're up to your famous tricks. What did you say to the boy that made him mad?"

"I said about oranges and lemons, sweets, cigarettes. I was just getting ready to recollect in detail wind-up toys, briar-pipes, and back-scratchers, when he dropped the sky on me."

"I almost don't blame him. Half of me wants to hit you, itself. Come on, double-time. There's a siren, quick!"

And they went swiftly, another way, out of the park.

He drank the homemade wine because it was easiest. The food must wait until his hunger overcame the pain in his broken mouth. He sipped, nodding.

"Good, many thanks, good."

The stranger who had walked him swiftly out of the park sat across from him at the flimsy dining-room table as the stranger's wife placed broken and mended plates on the worn cloth.

"The beating," said the husband at last. "How did it happen?"

At this, the wife almost dropped a plate.

"Relax," said the husband. "No-one followed us. Go ahead, old man, tell us, why do you behave like a saint panting after martyrdom? You're famous, you know. Everyone's heard about you. Many would like to meet you. Myself, first, I want to know what makes you tick. Well?"

But the old man was only entranced with the vegetables on the chipped plate before him. Twenty-six, no, twenty-eight peas! He counted the impossible sum! He bent to the incredible vegetables like a man praying over his quietest beads. Twenty-eight glorious green peas, plus a few graphs of

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half-raw spaghetti announcing that today business was fair. But under the line of *pasta,* the cracked line of the plate showed where business for years now had been more than terrible.

The old man hovered counting above the food like a great and inexplicable buzzard, crazily fallen and roosting in this cold apartment, watched by his samaritan hosts until at last he said, "These twenty-eight peas remind me of a film I saw as a child. A comedian—do you know the word?—a funny man met up with a lunatic in a midnight house in this film and—"

The husband and wife laughed quietly.

"No, that's not the joke yet, sorry," the old man apologised. "The lunatic sat the comedian down to an empty table, no knives, no forks, no food. 'Dinner is served!' he cried. Afraid of murder, the comedian fell in with the make-believe. 'Great!' he cried, pretending to chew steak, vegetables, dessert. He bit nothings. 'Fine!' He swallowed air. 'Wonderful!' Eh . . . you may laugh now."

But the husband and wife, grown still, only looked at their sparsely-strewn plates.

The old man shook his head and went on. "The comedian, thinking to impress the madman, exclaimed, 'And these spiced brandy peaches! Superb!' 'Peaches?' screamed the madman, drawing a gun. 'I served no peaches! You must be insane!' And shot the comedian in the behind!"

The old man, in the silence which ensued, picked up the first pea and weighed its lovely bulk upon his bent tin fork. He was about to put it in his mouth when—

There was a sharp rap at the door.

"Special police!" a voice cried.

Silent but trembling, the wife hid the extra plate.

The husband rose calmly to lead the old man to a wall where a panel hissed open, and he stepped in and the panel hissed shut and he stood in darkness hidden away as, beyond, unseen, the apartment door opened. Voices murmured excitedly. The old man could imagine the special policeman in his midnight blue uniform, with drawn gun, entering to see only the flimsy furniture, the bare walls, the echoing linoleum floor, the glassless, cardboarded-over windows, this thin and oily film of civilisation left on an empty shore when the storm tide of war went away.

"I'm looking for an old man," said the tired voice of authority beyond the wall.

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Strange, thought the old man, even the Law sounds tired now.

"Patched clothes—"

But, thought the old man, I thought everyone's clothes were patched!

"Dirty. About eighty years old..."

But isn't everyone dirty, everyone old? the old man cried out, to himself.

"If you turn him in, there's a week's rations as reward," said the police voice. "Plus ten cans of vegetables, five cans of soup, bonus."

Real tin cans with bright printed labels, thought the old man. The cans flashed like meteors rushing by in the dark over his eyelids. What a fine reward! Not *ten thousand dollars*, not *twenty thousand dollars*, no, no, but... five incredible cans of real not imitation soup, and ten, count them, ten brilliant circus-coloured cans of exotic vegetables like string beans and sun-yellow corn! Think of it!

Think!

There was a long silence in which the old man almost though he heard faint murmurs of stomachs turning uneasily, slumbered but dreaming of dinners much finer than remnants of old illusions gone nightmare and politics gone sour in the long twilight since AD, Annihilation Day.

"Soup. Vegetables," said the police voice, a final time. "Fifteen solidly-packed cans!"

The door slammed.

The boots stomped away through the ramshackle tenement, pounding coffin-lid doors to stir other Lazarus souls alive to cry aloud of bright tins and real soups. The poundings faded. There was a last banging slam.

And at last the hidden panel whispered up. The husband and wife did not look at him as he stepped out. He knew why and wanted to touch their elbows.

"Even I," he said gently. "Even I was tempted to turn myself in, to claim the reward, to eat the soup..."

Still they would not look at him.

"Why," he asked. "Why didn't you hand me over? Why?"

The husband, as if suddenly remembering, nodded to his wife. She went to the door, hesitated, her husband nodded again, impatiently, and she went out, noiseless as a puff of cobweb. They heard her rustling along the hall, scratching softly at doors, which opened to gasps and murmurs.

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"What's she up to? What are *you* up to?" asked the old man.

"You'll find out. Sit. Finish your dinner," said the husband.

"Tell me why you're such a fool—you make us fools who seek you out and bring you here."

"Why am I such a fool?" The old man sat. The old man munched slowly, taking peas one at a time from the plate which had been returned to him.

"Yes, I am a fool. How did I start my foolishness? Years ago I looked at the ruined world, the dictatorships, the desiccated states and nations, and said, 'What can I do? Me, a weak old man, what? Rebuild a devastation? Ha! Ha!'

"But lying half asleep one night an old phonograph record played in my head. Two sisters named Duncan sang out of my childhood a song called *Remembering*. 'Remembering, is all I do, dear, so try and remember, too.'

"I sang the song and it wasn't a song but a way of life. What did I have to offer a world that was forgetting? My memory! How could this help? By offering a standard of comparison. By telling the young *what once was*, by considering our losses. I found the more I remembered, the more I *could* remember! Depending on who I sat down with I remembered imitation flowers, dial telephones, refrigerators, kazoos—you ever *play* a kazoo?—thimbles, bicycle-clips, not bicycles, no, but bicycle-*clips*! isn't that wild and strange? Antimacassars. Do you know them? Never mind.

"Once a man asked me to remember just the dashboard dials on a Cadillac. I remembered. I told him in detail. He listened. He cried great tears down his face. Happy tears? Or sad? I can't say. I only remember. Not literature, no, I never had a head for plays or poems, they slip away, they die. All I am, really, is a trash-heap of the mediocre, the third-best hand-me-down useless and chromed-over slush and junk of a race-track civilisation that ran 'last' over a precipice.

"So all I offer really is scintillant junk, the clamoured-after chronometers and absurd machineries of a never-ending river of robots and robot-mad owners. Yet, one way or another, civilisation *must* get back on the road. Those who can offer fine butterfly poetry, let them remember, let them offer. Those who can weave and build butterfly *nets*, let them weave, let them build. My gift is smaller than both, and perhaps contemptible in the long hoist, climb, jump towards the old and

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amiably silly peak. But I *must* dream myself worthy. For the things, silly or not, that people remember are the things they will search for again. I will, then, ulcerate their half-dead desires with vinegar-gnat memory. Then perhaps they'll rattle bang the Big Clock together again, which is the city, the state, and then the world. Let one man want wine, another lounge chairs, a third a batwing glider to soar the March winds on and build bigger electro-pterodactyls to scour even greater winds, with even greater peoples. Someone wants moron Christmas trees and some wise man goes to cut them. Pack this all together, wheel in want, want in wheel, and I'm just there to oil them, but oil them I do.

"Ho, once I would have raved, 'only the best is best, only quality is true!' But roses grow from blood manure. Mediocre must be, so most-excellent can bloom. So I shall be the *best* mediocre there is and fight all who say slide under, sink back, dust-wallow, let brambles scurry over your living grave. I shall protest to the roving apeman tribes, the sheep-people munching the far fields preyed on by the feudal land-baron wolves who rarefy themselves in the few skyscraper summits and hoard unremembered foods. And these villains I will kill with can-opener and corkscrew. I shall run them down with ghosts and thrash them with liquorice whips until they cry for some sort of unqualified mercy. Can I *do* all this? One can only try."

The old man rummaged the last pea, with the last words, in his mouth, while his Samaritan host simply looked at him with gently amazed eyes, and far off up through the house people moved, doors tapped open and shut, and there was a gathering outside the door of this apartment where now the husband said, "And *you* asked why we didn't turn you in? Do you hear that out there?"

"It sounds like everyone in the apartment house—"

"Everyone. Old man, old fool, do you remember—motion picture houses, or better, drive-in movies?"

The old man smiled. "Do *you*?"

"Almost. Look, listen, today, now, if you're going to be a fool, if you want to run risks, do it in the aggregate, in one fell blow. Why waste your breath on one, or two, or even three if—"

The husband opened the door and nodded outside. Silently, one at a time, and in couples, the people of the house entered. Entered this room as if entering a synagogue or church or the kind of church known as a movie or the kind of movie known

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as a drive-in, and the hour was growing late in the day, with the sun going down the sky, and soon in the early evening hours, in the dark, the room would be dim and in the one light the voice of the old man would speak and these would listen and hold hands and it would be like the old days with the balconies and the dark, or the cars and the dark, and just the memory, the words, of popcorn, and the words for the gum and the sweet drinks and toffee, but the words, anyway, the words . . .

And while the people were coming in and settling on the floor, and the old man watched them, incredulous that he had summoned them here without knowing, the husband said, "Isn't this better than taking a chance in the open?"

"Yes. Strange. I hate pain. I hate being hit and chased. But my tongue moves. I must hear what it has to say. But this is better."

"Good." The husband pressed a red ticket into his palm. "When this is all over, an hour from now, here is a ticket from a friend of mine in Transportation. One train crosses the country each week. Each week I get a ticket for some idiot I want to help. This week, it's you."

The old man read the destination on the folded piece of red paper: "Chicago Abyss," and added, "is the Abyss still there?"

"This time next year Lake Michigan may break through the last crust and make a new lake in the pit where the city once was. There's life of sorts round the crater rim, and a branch train goes west once a month. Once you leave here, keep moving, forget you met or know us. I'll give you a small list of people like ourselves. A long time from now, look them up, out in the wilderness. But, for God's sake, in the open, alone, for a year, declare a moratorium. Keep your wonderful mouth shut. And here—" The husband gave him a yellow card. "A dentist I know. Tell him to make you a new set of teeth that will only open at meal times."

A few people, hearing, laughed, and the old man laughed quietly, and the people were in now, dozens of them, and the day was late, and the husband and wife shut the door and stood by it and turned and waited for this last special time when the old man might open his mouth.

The old man stood up.

His audience grew very still.

The train came, rusty and loud at midnight, into a suddenly

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snow-filled station. Under a cruel dusting of white, the ill-washed people crowded into and through the ancient carriages, mashing the old man along the corridor and into an empty compartment that had once been a lavatory. Soon the floor was a solid mass of bed-roll on which sixteen people twisted and turned in darkness, fighting their way into sleep.

The train rushed forth to white emptiness.

The old man, thinking, Quiet, shut up, no, don't speak, nothing, no, stay still, think! careful! cease! found himself now swayed, joggled, hurled this way and that as he half crouched against a wall. He and just one other were upright in this monster room of dreadful sleep.

A few feet away, similarly shoved against the wall, sat an eight-year-old boy with a drawn sick paleness escaping from his cheeks. Full awake, eyes bright, he seemed to watch, he *did* watch, the old man's mouth. The boy gazed because he must.

The train hooted, roared, swayed, yelled, and ran.

Half an hour passed in a thunderous grinding passage by night under the snow-hidden moon, and the old man's mouth was tight-nailed shut. Another hour, and the muscles round his cheeks began to slacken. Another, and his lips parted to wet themselves. The boy stayed awake. The boy saw. The boy waited. Immense sifts of silence came down the night air outside, tunnelled by avalanche train. The travellers, very deep in invoiced terror, numbed by flight, slept, each separate, but the boy did not take his eyes away, and at last the old man leaned forward, softly.

"Sh. Boy. Your name?"

"Joseph."

The train swayed and groaned in its sleep, a monster floundering through timeless dark towards a morn that could not be imagined.

"Joseph..." The old man savoured the word, bent forward, his eyes gentle and shining. His face filled with pale beauty.

His eyes widened until they seemed blind. He gazed at a distant and hidden thing. He cleared his throat ever so softly. "Ah..."

The train roared round a curve. The people rocked in their snowing sleep.

"Well, Joseph," whispered the old man. He lifted his fingers softly in the air. "Once upon a time..."

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Hurley's Life of Samuel Johnson

by
MORRIS LURIE

I WAS woken by a voice from the past.

"Ben Hurley," it said. "I'm at Hellinger's. *For God's sake come at once.*"

Then it was gone and I was left with the click and the emptiness of the phone still to my ear, trying to work out whether I was awake or asleep, sitting on the edge of my bed. Ben Hurley. No-one had heard from him for four years. I needed coffee and I needed sleep and it was ten in the morning and only three hours since I'd gone to bed and no-one had phoned, it was a joke, Hurley was— *For God's sake* . . . His thin voice whispered in my ear again.

I got dressed the way I would if the President of the United States phoned me at two in the morning and said, *Come!* I put my coat on in the lift going down and ran out into the street and stopped a cab. It was raining. It was another grey, grainy, damp, miserable morning in the London I kept telling myself I loved.

"Regular bag of water," the cab driver said.

I told him where I wanted to go. Ben Hurley? *For God's sake* . . . ? We pushed our way through the traffic-choked streets.

Hellinger's was dark. The chairs were up on the tables and the floor smelled wet, just washed. There was a yellow light over the bar and a boy peeling oranges into a glass bowl.

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"Coffee," I said, as he nodded towards the back of the room. I started threading through the tables, not seeing anything, and then I saw Ben Hurley. He was wearing a coat with the collar up, a dark, small shape. In no light at all I saw his right hand was on the table. Smoke was coming up from an ashtray. The table was wet with circles. Before I could see his face or sit down, he said, "Congratulate me—I've just written *David Copperfield*."

I knew Ben Hurley before the world did, on the isle of Rhodes. Everyone was writing novels, or painting. We were from the States and from England and from Australia and from France; living in the old houses at Lindos, where the knights once lived and built their white houses with courtyards and carved façades, and the yellow stone battlements on the hill, layers of history, dozed in the sun. The sea was blue. Donkeys brayed. It was beautiful. And it was cheap. The town had shrunk to a village and we worked and swam and sat in the sun and dreamed about success. We were young. I was twenty-five. This was before Greece became a place to go to and the tourist buses emptied into the *platia* and the donkeys took the Germans and the Danes and the Swedes and the British and the Americans, with their cameras and their check-lists of things to see and things to buy, up the hill to the acropolis and then down again; sixty bus-loads in the one lucrative day. This was before the Greeks got wise and made souvenirs, before the five-language sign went up on the church: *Women to enter must be modestly dressed.*

Ben Hurley was English. He lived alone and he worked alone and at night we would bump into him walking with his hands in his pockets, looking up at the stars and the white cubes of the village twinkling in the night and the dark sea. He never talked about his writing. He was from the North; his father still worked, in a bicycle factory, but Hurley got no letters from him. Sometimes he would sit with us in the *taverna* under the trees, or on the roof of one of our houses and drink a glass of *ouzo* and listen to our small talk and our plans; but he hardly said a word. He didn't ask to read what we had written, to look at our pictures, and he volunteered nothing about himself.

He was with us for a year. Then he packed up and was gone, without a word, and the next we heard, his novel, *The Owl*, was a sensation in England and a best-seller in the States and was being made into a movie and a play.

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There were photos of Hurley everywhere. The papers were full of him.

Meanwhile, I had scrapped my novel, sold some stories, called it quits and taken a journalist's job in London. I saw Hurley there. Four years ago.

I bumped into him in Earl's Court. He was looking fine, well-dressed, immaculately tanned, and I suggested we have a coffee for old times' sake.

"Why not?" he said.

I took him to Hellinger's. We talked. I told him about my work and I name-dropped names and I made it seem like one hell of a job. He listened politely.

"And what about your plans?" I asked him. "Spoilt by success? Got another best-seller up your sleeve?"

He looked up from his coffee and for a second his eyes were black. It was a look of stabbing hatred. "It's always the next one, isn't it?" he said quietly, like a man who says in a bad movie, "You poisoned my wife," and for a minute everything was dead still. Then he threw back his head and laughed. He rocked with laughter, his usually fine, small mouth huge with it, his large dark eyes all swallowed up.

I stared at him. I had never seen him laugh like that before.

Then he stopped laughing and became small again. He looked at his watch. "I'd better run," he said.

We finished our coffees. I wrote my phone number down on a piece of paper and he tucked it away in his jacket pocket and then we stood up.

"Which way are you going?" I asked him. "We can share a cab."

"I'll walk," he said and was gone—before I could even think to invite him to dinner, or to find out where he was staying: and then no-one, no-one in the world, saw or heard of him for four years, until this morning, when his strange voice had whispered in my ear, "*For God's sake come at once.*"

"Get out of here," Ben Hurley said.

I held on to the back of a chair.

"Get the hell out of here! Beat it! For God's sake get out of here!"

I sat down.

And then I saw Hurley's face. It was a wreck of the face that had once appeared on the cover of *Time*. It had aged ten years in four. His hair was grey and the lines down from his nostrils and the pits of his cheeks were dark and deep.

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There was stubble like dust in the lines. His whole face seemed to be trembling. His eyes were enormous.

Now I was awake. I saw the fire of belligerence die in his eyes. His face closed up like a grey paper in a flame. His right hand was white and still on the top of the table. I waited.

"Thank God you came," he said.

"Ben," I said, not knowing what to say, because there wasn't anything else to say. His ruined face horrified me. I tried to remember the man I had known in Greece—quiet, with his hands in his pockets and his long hair combed back. I tried to remember Hurley in Earl's Court, tanned and immaculate, four short years ago.

He looked down at his hand and I looked at him quickly and then at the necklace of wet circles and the crammed ashtray, still smoking with badly-stubbed butts. "Give me a cigarette," he said.

The boy brought the coffee to the table. "Bring another cup," I told him.

I could hear the faint swish of tyres on the wet road outside, but in here, with the chairs up-ended and pointing to the ceiling and the mahogany panelling and the dark leather and the shadow of a successful man huddled in his coat, there was no time, no clocks ticked, no sun shone, no rain fell; everything hung still and waited.

"Now, tell me," I said to Ben Hurley.

"It's exact," he said. "I've checked it through. There's not a word different, not a punctuation mark left out, not a spelling mistake. I've got every name right, every single chapter."

The words came out of his mouth as slowly and carefully as rope payed out through a climber's hands on the side of a mountain, where one mistake means death. I didn't dare say a word.

"It took me four days," he said. "I started at night, late, and the next thing I knew I was lying on the floor. I must have passed out. I felt hollow and weak—God, I could hardly move, and then I saw the paper all over the table and some of it had fallen on the floor and at first I didn't know what it was. I picked up a page. It made no sense. There were hundreds of pages. I couldn't understand a word. I couldn't remember writing any of it. And then suddenly I knew what it was. *David Copperfield.* It had to be that. I started putting the pages in order and my hands were shaking and my eyes were

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coming out of my head. And then I saw myself in the mirror. I nearly died. I opened the front door and there were four bottles of milk and four newspapers and I knew what day it was and I knew what had happened. I'd written *David Copperfield*."

He started to cave in. Both his hands were shaking, they were like white blurs in the dark.

"Ben," I said. "Get hold of yourself! Ben!"

He looked up at me but he was looking at no-one. "I read that book six years ago," he said. "Before Greece. And now it's come back. All the others, and now this."

"The others?" A cold finger of fear touched my spine.

"*Madame Bovary*," he said. "*Silas Marner*. *When I have fears that I may cease to be*—that was the first one."

"Keats?"

"I found it in the middle of a paragraph—just like that, in the middle of a sentence. That was the first. That was four years ago. I thought at first— God, I don't know, I didn't want to believe it, I crossed it out, I laughed. I was working hard and I thought it had just popped into my mind like the words of a song you hear on the radio all the time and can't get out of your head..."

He took another cigarette from the packet I'd put on the table. I watched him light it. There was a lot of effort going into keeping the match steady.

"And then I found, *Now is the winter of our discontent*. I laughed at that, too. But not so much. There were three lines of it. More than I can remember now. That's the *point*. I can never remember anything. I can't remember phone numbers, I forget people's names, I—"

"Steady, Ben," I said.

"But they got bigger." Now he was talking quickly. "There was a whole paragraph from *Huckleberry Finn*. Then, *Do not go gentle into that good night*. Victor Hugo. Hemingway. You know what's happening, don't you?"

"Drink your coffee, Ben."

"I'm a rich man," he said. "I wrote a best-seller. It's a film, it's a play, kids read it in school, and I'm terrified of writing something that's bad. That's what's happened." His eyes were fixed on mine like an adder's.

"I'm terrified to sit down at my typewriter. I'm terrified to move. I'm terrified to think. There's something inside me and it won't let me write what I want to write. Can't you see? It won't let me take the chance of writing something bad.

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It tells me what to do, it—it keeps telling me what to do."

"Go to a doctor, Ben." The words sounded foolish as soon as they were out of my mouth. But I had no other words to say.

"Doctors? I've been to dozens of them. Psychiatrists. Analysts. God, you don't know where I've been! And what for? I know what's wrong with me. I'm dead scared of failure, that's what's wrong. There's a whole worldful of people out there waiting for me to make a mistake and I can't take the chance. They're out there, ready to tear me to pieces."

"Ben, that's ridiculous, no-one is—"

"You don't know how it is," he said. "You haven't tasted success. You haven't seen those faces swimming in front of you, those hands reaching out to touch you." He crushed out his cigarette and looked at me.

"You know what one doctor told me?" he said. "He said there's a part of your brain that remembers everything you've ever seen, every word you've ever read. It's printed in there, it's folded into your cells, and when you want it you can take it out. I don't want it. I don't want to remember *anything*; I want peace."

"Ben—stop writing. Go and lie in the sun. Go and get drunk. Get a job and sweat it out of you!"

"What do you think I've been *doing*?" he said. "Do you think I sit at my typewriter and wait for it to happen? I've been everywhere. I've been to Japan. I lived there for a year and thought about nothing. I worked in a factory in Germany for six months. I've got myself so blind drunk for weeks on end... I'm a writer," he said, his voice low again, pleading, "I have to write. I want to write. I want to sit down like any man in the world and say what I have to say, I want—"

"It'll go, Ben. It'll go. It can't last for ever."

"Sure it'll go. When I've spat up everything that's in my brain. When I've written *War and Peace*. When I've written all of Proust and fall over dead—that's when it'll go."

I felt sick and exhausted and absolutely helpless. Ben Hurley was sitting not two feet away and crying for help and I couldn't reach him. I couldn't touch him. He was locked away.

"It's inside me now," he said. "It's ticking away inside my head, remembering, getting my fingers ready to speak the next time I touch my typewriter."

"Don't touch it, Ben. Don't go near a typewriter. Don't

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pick up a pen. Throw out every pencil you've got in the house, every sheet of paper. Get—"

I felt as lost as he was.

And then Ben Hurley's lips started to move. He was looking into my eyes but his stare was vacant, a long way away, inwards.

"*To write the life of him who excelled all mankind in writing the lives of others,*" he began, "*and who, whether we consider his extraordinary endowments—*"

"Ben."

"*—or his various works, has been equalled by few in any age, is an arduous—*"

"Ben!"

He stopped. His enormous dark eyes looked into mine. His lips were a thin line. His hands on the table were dead still.

Then his lips parted again and the same small voice came out of them: "*Hurley's Life of Samuel Johnson,*" it said.

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"I'm worried."

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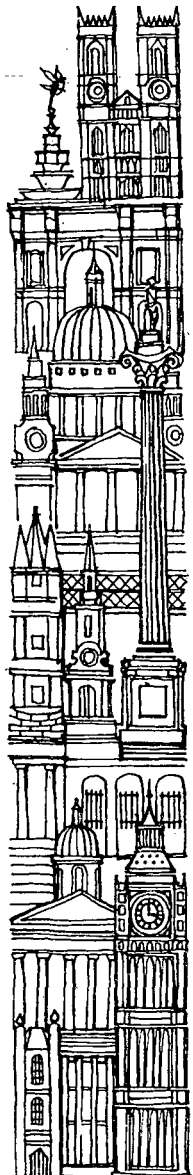

How well do you know London?

1. What is the official residence of the Lord Mayor of London?
2. Where is Traitors' Gate?
3. For what purpose was Marble Arch originally designed?
4. How many lions "guard" Nelson's column?
5. Which monument serves to commemorate the dead of two World Wars?
6. Where is Karl Marx buried?
7. Which church was restored after the war as the church of the Royal Air Force?
8. How did Big Ben get its name?
9. Where does the ceremony of "Trooping the Colour" take place?
10. In which building can you get the impression of "the whole Commonwealth rising to the roof"?
11. What does The Monument commemorate?
12. Which park is the smaller—St. James's or Green Park?
13. Where can you walk the "Ladies' Mile"?
14. A statue of William Shakespeare, identical to that in Westminster Abbey, can be found—where?
15. Which building is nicknamed "The House"?
16. Where would you look for the Elgin Marbles?

Please turn to page 123 for the answers.

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The impact of metal against metal had sounded like a ricochet of a bullet. He was thrown to the floor with stunning force, waiting for he knew not what—

Lion in the Lane

BY DOROTHY M. POWELL

THIS morning, old Sam, the zoo keeper, felt wretched. The sun shone brilliantly in a hot, blue sky but here, on the gravelled path behind the cages, the leaves slapped wetly as he passed. Sam's mouth twitched with affection when he heard the grumbling cough of Monarch, the lion. For a moment, the nagging ache behind his shoulders was forgotten.

Between the man and the great cat there existed a peculiar affinity. Both had come to the zoo in their late prime. Both had lost their mates and had acquired younger ones. Monarch, Sam thought whimsically, had been given no choice in the matter. But Sam had to admit (although never aloud) that in his own case he should have known better.

As Sam let himself into the lion's quarters, the old beast quietened, settling slowly to the floor of the cage and eyeing the man sleepily with glowing amber slits.

"Well, Monarch, how goes it today?"

For Sam, the habit of carrying on a running conversation with his leonine charge was a pleasurable one. There was no talking back, no interruption. Monarch was a good listener. But, apart from fathering cubs, Sam could give his big friend little credit for anything else. Daily, Monarch disappointed his spectators with a lack of showmanship. When he roared, which was seldom, the great cavern of his mouth revealed only a few stumps yellowed with age, and Sam felt a curious

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sadness when he realised just how long he'd been chopping up the old fellow's meat ration.

Suddenly aware of the overpowering odour of animals penned too long, the old keeper's stomach knotted in rebellion. It certainly felt as if he had picked up one of those viruses.

With the thought that a little air might help, he hastened to manipulate the catches on the iron door separating the inner and outer cages. His long, pronged bar screeched against the metal, and Monarch swung his still regal head towards the opening. Then, rising slowly, the big cat padded out into the hot sunlight.

"Fresh air's what we need," Sam muttered, as he opened the door at the back of the building marked *Zoo Attendants Only*.

Outside, on the sunbaked concrete, Monarch lay soaking up the comforting heat. He purred a little. To him, the trees were only green blurs seen through a film of age. Then, the wind singing through the cage bars brought with it the familiar smell of warm, waving grasses. In the big cat it stirred a long-lost memory of the veld where once he had roamed free. Where, at the beginning of the rains, he had led his mate and cubs across to the high, rocky plateau of the kopje.

He moved restlessly. Momentarily his pads lay in a pool of water left over from last night's downpour. Confused, the lion shook his massive head. Where was the pride to which he belonged? Where the kiewiets, noisy birds screeching above? The bushveld seemed to stretch endlessly blue before him and with a sudden, fluid motion, Monarch rose to his feet...

Later, when he was questioned, Sam never could figure what exactly had happened. His back had been turned to the inner cage door when a huge body hurtled against it. The impact of metal against metal had sounded like the ricochet of a bullet. Sam had been thrown to the floor with stunning force, waiting with stomach curled for he knew not what. He remembered raising his head, finally, in time to see Monarch padding out of the open door. Then Sam sank to the floor and was thoroughly ill.

So Monarch made a last bid for freedom.

Sam was convinced the old lion would not get very far. His age was against him and he had left some blood spattered in his wake. The old fellow must've gashed himself when he charged the cage door.

In a new house on Willow Street, Beth Finlay stood, with

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her hands in dishwater bubbles, and sniffed with pleasure the warm wind rushing in through the window. A lovely, lovely day, she thought. Sometimes, when it was dull, she felt isolated here. Today, it didn't matter.

Smiling, she watched her daughter, Kathie, struggle to carry all her little-girl paraphernalia to the summerhouse at the bottom of the garden. Her ponytail bobbed with three-year-old importance as she held Pinky, the teddy, in one arm and an indeterminate character called "the mutt" in the other. In one small hand she clutched her newest possession, a nurse's kit. Beth had just replenished it with three new plasters. If this was to be "hospital day," Beth reasoned that Kathie wouldn't stir from the summerhouse for an hour or more. Funny little kid, she thought fondly. Seemed to prefer her own company to that of other small humans.

"I think Kathie must be a throwback," she once remarked to her husband, Mike. "She has what I call a poke-bonnet face."

"She's just a 1965 pixie," he retorted. "Like her mother."

The back-door bell rang loudly and it was followed by a peremptory knocking. Annoyed, Beth went to dry her hands and thought, What's all the hurry?

The blue-uniformed policeman sent her mind scurrying with fright to Dave, her son at school.

"Don't be alarmed, ma'am," he said. "There's no cause for it. At least, not yet."

"Yet?" she queried weakly.

"A lion has escaped from the zoo," he informed her. "There's good reason to believe it might be in this area."

Beth gasped.

"We have a cordon around six blocks and the streets are patrolled," the officer went on. "If you have any children, you'd better get them indoors. Right away."

Beth was halfway to the summerhouse before the man turned to go. "And *keep* them indoors," he called after her. "An announcement will be on the radio when the danger is over."

Shaded by the flowering almond tree, the light inside the summerhouse seemed dim. Kathie was bending over Pinky, carefully sticking a plaster to a shapeless ear. She glanced over her shoulder and whispered, "Pinky is sick, Mummy."

Beth tried to control the urgency she felt. Her voice, when it came, sounded flat. "Mummy wants you to come inside, dear. This minute!"

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"But Pinky is sick."

The wind rustled the scrub oak and Beth scooped Kathie into her arms, grabbing Pinky at the same time.

Depositing her daughter on the kitchen floor, she said breathlessly, "We'll have a tea party—downstairs in the basement room."

Tilted hazel eyes regarded her reproachfully, then brimmed with tears. "I want my mutt!" Kathie sobbed. "You didn't bring my mutt!"

The basement windows were very small but Beth's eyes kept straying in their direction. The four windows in sight were locked. But the fifth one was in the laundry room.

Kathie did not notice her mother's distraction. Unaccustomed to this mid-morning attention, she was delighting in the real tea in her miniature teapot, the peanut-butter sandwiches on a doll's plate.

Beth got up with the intention of checking on the laundry-room window. Upstairs the telephone rang. Startled, she tensed at the ordinary sound, every nerve taut.

"Back in a minute, dear," she flung over her shoulder as she raced upstairs.

With a sense of relief she recognised Joan Mackie, a morning-coffee friend of long standing. Joan's usual infectious gaiety was missing.

Without any preamble, she asked, "Beth? Have you heard the news?"

"I have. It's too fantastic to believe."

"How do you suppose the thing escaped?"

"I haven't any idea. As a matter of fact, I meant to switch on the radio. But I've been trying to keep Kathie entertained."

Joan's voice trembled. "What about the children coming home from school. They wouldn't let them out, would they?"

"Good heavens! I never thought of that. Oh, surely not!"

"Well," Joan said, "it's only eleven o'clock. Maybe they'll capture it before lunchtime."

Replacing the receiver in its cradle, Beth felt better for having talked with someone. The schools would be warned, she was sure, and for a moment she allowed herself to relax at the small telephone table in the hall.

She noticed that the lock on the front door was tightly bolted. Then, deliberately and slowly, Beth walked from window to window, heart pounding. If I saw it, she thought, I'd die of fright. But there was nothing. Nothing on the

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front lawn, nothing but the new, green grass Mike had sown just this spring. Nothing at the back. At least, nothing she could see. The scrub oaks screened the back lane, even filled the six empty lots between the Finlay house and others on the street. Not a thing moved out there. Generally, there was some traffic on the road. Today there wasn't a soul in sight. Beth shivered. The whole scene reminded her of the empty main street in a Western suspense movie.

With a helpless shrug, she realised that there was still a tea party going on downstairs in the basement. There had been no sound from Kathie for quite some time. When one was just three, a real tea party could be a pretty absorbing affair.

Pinky, the teddy, was sitting lopsided on a kindergarten chair, his plaster looking very white against a soiled, plush ear.

"Say!" Beth called. "Where's my cup of tea?"

There was no answer. Kathie wasn't here! But, she *had* to be! Upstairs! That's where she'd be. Above the noise of her stumbling feet and the hard, beating pulse in her ears, Beth thought she caught the sound of a car engine. But it had no real significance. Because Kathie wasn't upstairs either! There was only one alternative. Kathie had gone outside for her mutt!

Monarch had gone in a north-westerly direction, skirting the fringes of the city. The smell of man was fainter there. He paused for a moment by the reservoir and a nearsighted employee saw the animal partly obscured by the bushes. He did not recognise it as a lion.

Down by the river, some youngsters playing truant from school, who were fishing in a secluded spot, were startled by the sudden crackling of the underbrush. When they went to investigate, there was nothing there.

Monarch crossed the railway tracks. On the other side, what had seemed a grassy plain was only a strange meadow. He was tired and confused, the wound on his flank aching and cinders packed between his huge pads. Ahead lay a wide, bushy trail, and beside it a small, brown house. But, as he drew near, the taint of man became stronger.

Monarch had seen many small, man-creatures staring at him through the bars of his cage. Always, they were associated with the presence of hard, flying missiles; pebbles, paper balls and peanuts. This one in the brown house seemed different. The child regarded him quietly with eyes not unlike those of

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a small cub; speckled amber like the still, golden depths of a jungle pool.

Catapulting down the garden walk, Beth flung open the summerhouse door. The tiny figure standing alone with the mutt in her arms was the most wonderful thing she had ever seen.

"Kathie!" Beth gasped. "Oh, Kathie darling!"

Clutching her convulsively, she had never been so acutely aware of the child's delicate bone-structure.

Above the oaks and halfway down the lane, the top of a van was visible. If Beth had looked in that direction she would have seen it. But her only immediate concern was to reach the safety of the back door.

Inside, she put Kathie down, straightening her abbreviated skirt. A stain the colour of rust caught Beth's attention and she fingered the material.

"What's this, Kathie? Did you hurt yourself?"

Kathie looked up accusingly. "You loved me too tight," she complained.

They sat by the radio, side by side, and Beth had not realised how long an hour could seem. When the announcement for which she was waiting finally came, she was caught unawares.

"Attention! We interrupt this programme to bring you an important news item. The lion which escaped this morning from Glendale Park Zoo, has been captured."

That evening, the family listened to the six o'clock news.

The announcer's voice sounded so impersonal, Beth thought. That morning, he said, there had been a nasty crossing smash-up. And, someone had been held up and robbed in broad daylight...

"Well, come on!" she exclaimed. "Let's get on with it!"

"Impatient, aren't we?" Mike remarked.

Beth opened her mouth to retort, then closed it again. Tonight, when the children were in bed, she would tell Mike in detail about the whole frightening experience.

The voice on the radio continued: "Locally, there was great excitement this morning when Monarch, the lion, escaped from Glendale Park Zoo. He eluded the attendants after mauling a deer in one of the enclosures. Park Superintendent Hunter withheld the facts as to just how the big cat managed his bid for freedom. Near panic reigned among residents of Winston Heights district when a cordon of police, armed with

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guns, surrounded the area and bore down on the trapped animal in the back lane of Willow Street. However, the report is that Monarch gave them little trouble and actually seemed happy to be back behind bars."

"Gee!" Dave exclaimed. "Right in our own back lane!"

"But," the voice went on, "there is still a mystery surrounding Monarch's capture. Apparently, when the lion escaped he gashed his flank on the cage door."

The radio hummed as the announcer paused for effect.

"Somehow—somewhere—the big cat received first aid. When Monarch arrived back at his home in the park, there was a plaster neatly attached to his hide!"

Beth gripped the arms of her chair, her eyes widening with incredulous speculation.

Kathie sat up within the circle of Mike's arms.

"I saw the yion," she chirped.

Kathie had trouble with her consonants. After all, she was only three.

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ANSWERS TO THE QUIZ ON PAGE 116

1. Mansion House.
2. At the south front of the Tower of London.
3. As the main gateway to Buckingham Palace.
4. Four—all bronze, couchant.
5. The Cenotaph, in Whitehall.
6. Highgate Cemetery.
7. St. Clement Danes.
8. Big Ben was named after Sir Benjamin Hall, First Commissioner of Works at the time when the bell was cast.
9. Horse Guards Parade, Westminster.
10. The Commonwealth Institute, Kensington High Street.
11. The Great Fire of London, 1666.
12. Green Park.
13. On the north side of the Serpentine, in Kensington Gardens.
14. In the middle of Leicester Square's garden.
15. The Stock Exchange.
16. In the Duveen Gallery of the British Museum.

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A LIFE TO LOSE

LAWRENCE HAMMOND

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PART TWO OF ARGOSY'S THRILLER SERIAL

THOMAS WEBB, an Englishman living in France, is trying to reconcile himself to the death of his French wife by the OAS terrorist organisation. In a café in Marseilles, he meets **MAX GENOVESE** and his henchman, **CHIN-CHIN.** Max, a Corsican racketeer, is completing plans to send the unwilling **JEAN-LOUIS CALVORESI** back to Corsica in order to pinpoint a fortune of a million francs. Max has reason to believe it was hidden near the village of Christiu by the now-outlawed OAS. Unsure of Jean-Louis, and sensing Webb is at a loose end, Max hires Webb to tail Jean-Louis to Corsica and to report on his movements. During the journey and afterwards in a Corsican café, Webb and Jean-Louis become friends, and Webb discovers Jean-Louis is living in fear. He decides to drive inland to Christiu taking Jean-Louis and **MARIANE,** an enigmatic Corsican girl he has saved from attack in the café . . .

THEY turned their backs to the sea and their faces towards the high mountains, where a rim of snow could sometimes still be seen behind the distant green-black pines, and they drove towards Christiu.

The *maquis,* fragrant with rosemary and thyme and lavender and verbena and a thousand soft scents as sweet as their names, gave way to chestnuts, stretching their wide branches aburst with life, and pines standing like giant legions at rigid attention in uncountable numbers. They glimpsed, occasionally, the squat black figures of wild boars beneath the trees.

The girl dozed in the back; Webb drove the little Renault and, at his side, Jean-Louis sang Corsican songs, and told island stories, and kept his spirits high.

"It's nothing. You're soft!" he scoffed amiably at Webb when the Englishman expressed consternation at a particularly nightmarish bend which climbed as it twisted as it cambered the wrong way. "Before Napoleon Bonaparte was born, when his mother carried him in her womb, she walked and rode the mule along this very road when they had to move from Corte to Ajaccio. It's nothing to a Corsican!"

Webb muttered that the mule must have had a better first gear than their hired car.

They drove on deeper into "*le royaume vert,*" the green kingdom, so-called because this had been acknowledged as the

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kingdom where the bandits were unpursuable in the old days.

After a time Webb realised that Jean-Louis was sitting hunched and silent, his face brooding: he had suffered another of his rapid changes of mood, and had plunged suddenly through the thin shell of good humour into the black depression which always lay, waiting, behind his eyes.

Webb glanced at him several times when he dared to flick his eyes away from the precipitous road, and at last he said: "Why don't you tell me? I don't care, so it can't do any harm."

"You don't, do you? Don't care."

Jean-Louis thought about it. He looked over his shoulder at the girl, whose eyes were closed. Then he said in a low voice: "Get on with your driving then, and let me talk. You need not listen.

"I told you about vendetta. It is that which made me a coward—and my brother, Marc. He made up his mind to have a girl—only she didn't want to be had. Her brother found them wrestling. There was a bit of a fight—Marc had a knife, and her brother died. That did it!

"Of course, her father pronounced vendetta. Marc was cocky, he thought this was a lot of old-fashioned stuff; it had been a fair enough fight; and anyway, she had no more brothers and he was not afraid of an old man. That's what he said; it was probably true. I don't suppose he was even afraid when her father met him on the road, at night, and blew off his face with a shotgun.

"The old man was very proper. He had witnesses, men of his generation, who knew that this was a death of honour, and approved.

"My mother did not cry or seem surprised when they took my brother's body home. She just stared at them and said: 'This was vendetta? It was fair?' And they told her it was so, and she said: 'Then, before God, vendetta it shall be. I have no husband, but I have sons, and vendetta it shall be.'

"I was standing at the back, and she pulled me forward and made me look at my brother, and went on talking about what I had to do. I hardly heard her. I just felt sick. His face—it was all . . . mashed . . . gone. I kept looking at that . . . mess . . . and suddenly I was just . . . sick . . . there, in front of them, all over myself."

In the silence which followed, Webb saw from the corner of an eye that Jean-Louis was swallowing convulsively even now, as if trying not to vomit. He said nothing, and at last the

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Corsican went on: "All that night my mother kept on at me that I must continue the vendetta. I was the only man left in the house—my other brother was just a child—and it was up to me.

"I asked her what good it would do anyone to have my face blown off, and she said if I was a man I would see to it that the girl's father died, not me. She said if I loved my dead brother, I had no choice. If I loved him! I hated him, even more dead than alive. He had done this to me, confident, selfish, stupid, strong, he had done this to me, and I hated him. Why should I die for him? He'd gone after the girl and paid the price. I'd never even had a girl then, nobody, and why should I die for him?

"All night she kept on at me, and as soon as it was light I ran out of the house. I found myself walking towards the old man's place. I don't know why. Perhaps I thought if I saw him I might not be afraid of him.

"He was out at the back, washing under a tap. I stood behind some bushes and watched him, bent over, rubbing his face in his wet hands. He was not really old—about sixty. His face was brown, and wrinkled. He was hard, like a rock, a tree.

"He must have sensed something, because he raised his head from the water and stared at the bushes. I didn't want to, but I stepped out into the open, and just stood looking at him.

"He glanced down and then, for the first time, I saw that his shotgun was on the ground. A man in vendetta never moves without a gun, and I had not even thought of this. I felt paralysed.

"He did not move towards his gun. He just looked at me. Then he turned off the tap, very deliberately, picked up his gun, and turned his back on me and walked into the house.

"I knew then that I could never face this man, let alone kill him.

"I walked home. My mother had already put on mourning clothes, and I went upstairs and started to get out the black suit I had worn for my father's funeral. She followed me and said: 'Well?'

"I could not say anything, or look at her. I had put on a white shirt, and started knotting a black tie, and she said 'Well?' again.

"When I did not answer, she seemed to go mad. 'Coward! Coward!' she screamed at me.

"She snatched at the tie and tore it off. She grabbed the

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black coat from the bed and stood there, trying to rip it, and all the time screaming out: 'Coward! If you will not avenge your brother's death, you are no brother and no son. You cannot mourn the dead if you will not avenge them. No coward shall disgrace these clothes.'"

Jean-Louis stopped and for a long time, as the little car wound up the narrow mountain road, Webb waited for him to continue. Then he prompted: "And for the rest?"

"The rest?" Jean-Louis wanted it over quickly now. "I did not wear mourning and I had to go to the funeral in ordinary clothes—the only one. Everybody knew what that meant. Then I cleared out. I went down to Ajaccio and got a boat to Marseilles and I went into business. I do all right. I can manage without them. The hell with them!"

His voice was once again that of the cocky, brittle little man whom Webb had first met. The Englishman preferred the honest coward of a few minutes earlier, and he could not resist asking: "Is it such a good idea to come back, then?"

"There are worse things," said Jean-Louis. "A man has to choose between them, sometimes."

"That's what I told you," Webb answered. "A man is tested all the time."

Jean-Louis' mind had darted back to a conversation with Chin-Chin in a dingy room in the Old Quarter of Marseilles He was thinking of a million francs. A million. "Yes," he echoed, "a man is tested all the time. And sometimes—who knows?—it may be worth it."

And so they came to Christiu.

It was not much. A ribbon of road cut in the face of the mountain. On one side, a low stone wall to stop you falling through three thousand feet of space before you hit the tops of the trees on the lower slopes. On the other side, a sprinkling of houses, a church and a café, overshadowed by the steeply-rising, thickly-forested mountain face.

A trickle of water ran along in front of the houses and, at the end of the village, disappeared under the road and emerged somewhere down the hillside. Hens pecked in the gravel.

It was difficult to remember that down on the coast tourists were thronging hotels and holiday camps, splashing on water skis, grunting through snorkels in the warm sea, drinking cool drinks under beach umbrellas, ordering lobster salads in restaurants, dancing to guitars and little transistor radios, buying souvenirs and comparing the prices of their package tours.

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Up here it was a different world, unaware of the twentieth century. Up here, even the silence seemed different—older, heavier, timeless.

This was Christiu, and here they decided to stay. They checked into the only three rooms over the café. Jean-Louis gave a false name, in the hope that his past would not come out. The girl said she would get a job there and pay her way, and Webb said nothing.

The local people came to the café, and were polite, and watched them, and listened to their voices, and talked among themselves. The men, in black trousers, white shirts with broad red sashes round their waists—the sash that had been the mark of the bandit in the old days—leaned against the road-side wall, and picked their teeth, and smoked their Gauloises and dug into their memories. They listened to their instincts and thought of their pride, and one of them decided that early the next morning he would go on a little journey.

There was nothing more to be done that night, and so they went back into the café and played cards and were even more polite to the visitors.

THE boy lay sprawled on his stomach on the mattress in his tiny room at the top of the house. His chin rested in his cupped hands and his over-large black eyes devoured the book which lay on the pillow. *Tales of Old Corsica*, it was called, and this was the fourth time he had read it. He had, by now, only to read the first lines of a chapter for the rest of the story immediately to spring alive in his mind without the necessity of the words to guide him; but time and again he was drawn to the book, as if the turning of the pages was a ritual which conjured up for him the world of the old heroes and saints and bandits.

In his young mind, like bubbles in yeast, the characters fermented and played out their lives again. So many legends, and through them all the steel thread of pride, the fierce thread of honour, the red thread of vendetta.

Suddenly the door opened, and in the same instant the boy fumbled the book under his pillow. It was too late. His mother had seen, and her voice came from the doorway, berating him. He scarcely heard her; he scarcely needed to; it was always the same. No wonder you are thin, no wonder you are pale, always stuck with your nose in a book when you should be outside doing something useful. Thirteen years of

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age and legs like sticks, like an infant. What's the use of my slaving for you, and giving you good food to build you up, when all you ever do is...

He thought that if he let her go on she might wear herself out and forget the book. But she snatched it up and shook it at him.

"Words, stories, dreams—that's all you are, when you should be building your strength. When you are a man, *then* your dreams can be something and you can be a son to your mother. Sons should be a blessing. Do not let all mine be a curse to me. Georges, I beg you!"

He wriggled his legs uncomfortably and tried not to listen as she went on: "Is it not enough that Marc is dead, and Jean-Louis is worse than dead? You are all I have left—and I never even know what you think."

Now she was crying, and the boy said: "You know what I think, *Maman*. I think of the day when I will be a man, and avenge the death of Marc, and wipe out the shame of that other. I think of vendetta."

She stared at him and shook her head slowly. "You must make yourself a man first, and strong. Time enough then for vendetta." And she thought, a tiny hidden thought: Perhaps by then the old man will be dead, the girl's father will be dead, and there will be no need to avenge my first-born son.

She left the room, taking the book with her. But he knew she would not destroy it, he knew where she would hide it, and where he would find it again later.

He stretched out on the bed, and his fingers felt at the open neck of his shirt. They hooked under the thin silver chain which ran round his neck and gently swung the small silver crucifix. On one side was a rough relief of the figure of Christ, and on the other the initials *M.C.*

Three years earlier their mother had taken it from the dead body of Marc Calvoresi. She had swung it from her fingers, as the boy did now, and had looked from one to the other of the two sons who remained to her. As her eyes rested on Jean-Louis, she said in a voice of stone: "Never. No, never, shall you have it." And she turned and hung the crucifix around the neck of the child, Georges.

For Jean-Louis, it was the final shaming. For Georges, the beginning of the dream of vendetta. And now, the crucifix swung in the sunlight, and motes of dust moved about it, and if he half-closed his eyes they took shapes—the shapes of legends and of dreams.

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Later on the same day in this village that was twenty-five kilometres by road from Christiu, and shorter if you knew the way through the forest, the boy left the small house to walk through the village. Georges Calvoresi was going on a mission which fascinated him at the same time as it frightened him, and which he performed every week. For this was the hour and the day when the old man came down from the higher reaches of the mountains, left his sheep guarded by the dogs and came into the village to talk a little, and drink a little, and fetch the supplies for the remote herdsman's hut to which he had withdrawn. The old man was called Matteo. It was he who had shot Marc Calvoresi in vendetta. It was he who filled the thoughts of the boy Georges with fear and exultation.

The boy's sandals kicked up the dust from the dry road as he broke into a run. By the time he reached the main street, the man was already nearing the café; he held his boar-hunting shotgun in his right hand, a parcel of supplies from the village shop under his right arm, and, in his left hand, an oddly-bulked sack which seemed to be moving slightly.

The old man dumped his burdens on the ground and sat heavily in a chair outside the café, at a table already occupied by two other villagers who greeted him taciturnly.

Georges wandered closer. He made a minute inspection of the metal signs on the wall of the café, advertising Raphaël and Byrrh and Lillet, and tried hard to keep his eyes off the old man.

He did not know why he did this every week. Yet an uncontrollable fascination drew him to follow Matteo, to get close to him, to see the very texture of his skin and hear the sound of his voice. At these times the thought in his mind was not that this man had killed his brother but that he, Georges Calvoresi, would one day kill this man; and the thought was like a shivering thrill in him.

"Boy!" The old man's voice stilled his heart for a beat, and Georges could not answer. Matteo had half-turned and was looking full at him. Georges saw the heavy boots, the faded blue trousers, the faded blue shirt, the hat which was never seen to be removed and, under it, the eyes which were perpetually creased. Matteo was old, but his body was thin and straight and very hard. His face was like the shell of an old walnut, just as wrinkled, but a deeper brown, and now he said again: "Boy!"

Georges took a step forward, his hands suddenly grown huge

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and his feet heavy. The old man said quietly: "Boy, I have no quarrel with you. There is no vendetta with children. It is over, finished. But do not follow me like this. You understand? I do not like to see you. It is over. Go!"

Georges wanted to cry out: "I am not a child. I am a man! And this vendetta will not be over until I have killed you as you killed my brother." He wanted to hurl at that old face the almost ritual challenges of the Corsicans from his books and his dreams. But no sound came, and he backed away until the old man returned to his drink.

A few yards from the café the boy squatted beneath a tree, and watched, and felt inside his shirt, that his fingers might hold fast to the silver crucifix which hung about his neck.

The village men were asking Matteo what was in his sack. "Pups," he said. "The bitch left them in the high pasture. They starved. If anyone wants to take them on, they are here. If not, I'll knock them on the head before I go back."

Abruptly, he pulled a cord and tipped the sack, and spilled out four separate tiny bundles, brown and moist, sniffing frantically at the hot air, trying feebly to stand on weak legs which splayed and left them stranded on their stomachs.

"Anyone?" Matteo asked.

The men shook their heads. He shrugged his shoulders and bent to scoop the puppies back. One of them, stronger than the others, had found its legs and was wobbling across the vast distance of the road towards the boy who, all other thoughts forgotten, was on his knees, snapping his fingers and saying: "Come on then, little dog. Here, little one, come here."

Matteo followed the pup's shaky progress with his eyes, then stretched down a hard hand and scooped it up. For a moment, as he held the hot little animal in the air, he watched the face of the boy under the tree. Then, without a change of the walnut expression, he tossed the pup towards Georges. "Think about this, then. And stop following me," he said.

There was no thought in Georges; simply and all, a sudden joy. He leaped to his feet, seizing the animal, and began to run towards his home. But soon he stopped. This was Matteo's dog. Could you accept a gift from a man you were sworn to kill? Nothing in the vendetta stories he had read told him the answer. And what about his mother? Would she let him keep a dog from the man who had killed her eldest son? She must not know. He must think up some story.

He stared down at the small sharp face, at the half-blind eyes, the distended nostrils, the dry panting mouth where the

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black-masked muzzle ended. It was so hot, so dry. It was thirsty—that was it! Before anything could be decided the dog must drink, and while it drank he could plan what to do.

He turned and walked back into the café, past the impassive eyes of the men at the table, and said: "Please may I have some water for my dog?"

The dog's thirst was slaked and it lay sleeping in his lap as Georges sat and summoned the remaining courage needed to go home and tell his mother that he had found the animal abandoned in the mountains. Nearby, the three men still sat and smoked and sipped their beer and occasionally grunted, communing by presence and by long familiarity rather than by words.

Georges idly watched a small van draw up, and a stranger get out and join the others. He wore a white shirt and black trousers with a red sash, and the boy heard them ask him how things were in Christiu.

He did not hear the reply, but suddenly he sensed the shocked excitement that ran through the men. They did not move or speak for a moment, but seemed to become even more still, and it was as though the air was heavy and charged before a thunderstorm.

Matteo glanced round quickly at Georges, then away, and the four men's heads drew together and they spoke softly across the table.

After a few moments Matteo rose heavily and picked up his gun and his bundles.

"What will you do?" one of the others asked him.

"I shall see," he answered. Then, before moving away, he looked again at Georges and, meaningfully, back to the others, as if to warn them of something. He left, walking with the slow, inexorable and tireless stride that covers many miles.

The others paid their bill, and spoke quietly to the woman who ran the café, and then hurried off. The stranger drove off in his little van.

Georges realised that the woman of the café was standing over him, with an expression on her face that he could not understand. "You'd better get back home, you and your dog," she said.

"Please don't tell my mother where I got it," he said. "I'll say I found it. It's better that way."

"Don't worry, little Georges. Your mother will have other things to think of than a dog, I could tell you."

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She put out a hand and tousled his hair, but the gesture, though apparently affectionate, hurt. He twisted his head away.

"What other things?"

She could not hold back any longer. She thrust her face close to his and hissed: "That coward brother of yours is back, that's what. How he had the nerve to return to this island, I'll never know. Every man for miles will remember the face of a coward, a betrayer of vendetta..."

"Jean-Louis?" the boy managed to say at last. "Back? But..."

"Don't ask me why. Hiding out in Christiu with a lot of strangers. We'll see if he's got the guts to come back to his own village."

"Perhaps he has come back to honour the vendetta."

As he said the words the boy hoped, at the same time, that they were true and that they were not true.

"Honour the vendetta? That one?" The woman snorted and jutted her hands on her hips. "Face Matteo?"

Matteo... That reminded Georges. "What will the old man do?"

"You heard him," she said. "He'll see. It'll be up to that Jean-Louis."

Suddenly Georges seized the dog and pushed past the woman and walked quickly away. His mind spun, not with pictures this time but with the words. "He'll see... Up to that Jean-Louis... He'll see... Jean-Louis... Jean-Louis..."

And as he ran, and felt the rapid heartbeats of the dog against his own, the feeling grew in him that if Jean-Louis failed again there was a brother now who was not a coward and not a child but who might become a man, in vendetta.

IN Christiu, Mariane served drinks and washed glasses in exchange for her week's keep, sleeping alone in a small room.

Webb walked, and drank, and waited for events to tell him what to think. He watched the girl and—strangely, after what had passed between them—was aware of a constraint, a hiatus in communication, as if both were waiting for something to happen. And, of course, knowing that he should telephone Max Genovese in Marseilles and report, and postponing the moment, he watched Jean-Louis. This was an easy task, for the skinny Corsican was not getting very far.

Jean-Louis found an indifference, that was somehow more

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than that and less than that, when he tried to strike up conversation with the villagers. They were taciturn, as nearly all Corsicans are taciturn. They were polite. They were not overtly hostile. But there was something in their manner which choked his attempts at any probing conversation. It could be, he pondered, that they had something to hide, something to do with the OAS and with his mission. Or it could be that he had been recognised.

He had been aware of the risk, and had tried to tell himself that it was slight. Villages in the Corsican interior are separated by more than miles, and until now he had never in his life been to Christiu. On the other hand, the scandal of his cowardice after his brother's death had spread like a forest fire. There had been many strange faces at the funeral, eyeing the one whose bright everyday clothes stood out like a garish badge of shame among the sombre black of mourning; some might have come from Christiu.

Even so, was he recognisable? In the three years that had passed, his hair had changed, his clothes had changed, even his voice had changed—his whole manner was different. And yet... and yet... As fast as the thoughts returned, he tried to banish them and to dwell instead on the lure of a million new francs. A million: a fortune; and here—under any tree, behind any rock...

"Halt and be recognised!"

He had been walking idly along the road beyond the village, lost in thought, when the command rang out. He started, and looked round, wondering if he had heard right.

"Halt or I fire!"

The voice seemed to come from a clump of rocks just above the roadside, and as he stared he saw, fascinated, the single black cylinder of a gun-barrel slide into view.

"The password. Say the password!"

This was ridiculous. Jean-Louis didn't know what to do, and he fumbled in his pocket for cigarettes.

"You have cigarettes? American cigarettes?"

They were not American, but he found his voice and shouted: "Maybe."

An incredibly aged man came into view and scuttled down towards him, using the gun, an old sporting rifle with a very long barrel, as a sort of crutch.

Bent almost double like some brittle insect, he hopped in front of Jean-Louis and cackled toothlessly into his face: "Ho, you knew the password. Good thing for you, or I'd

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have done for you. I'd have spilt your guts. They shall not pass! The stinking Boches! Spill their guts . . ."

On and on he went, jerking his body in a convulsive shuffling jig. Jean-Louis offered him a cigarette and the old man snatched the packet and said: "Tobacco, you give us plenty of tobacco and we'll stop the Boches. Blood and tobacco, that's all it is, blood and tobacco. Millions of them dead. Such slaughter! Nobody knows . . ."

Footsteps sounded from behind, and Jean-Louis turned and saw a man of about seventy hurrying towards them. "I'm sorry," said the new arrival. "My brother. He's a little . . ." And, unnecessarily, he tapped his head. "He was at Verdun—you know, in the other war. All he thinks of is blood and slaughter."

"And cigarettes," Jean-Louis put in.

"He means no harm. But he still fights the battle."

The older brother, who must have been at least ninety, had subsided to a disgruntled mutter, and now he growled: "Don't take any notice of him. He doesn't know what killing is." Then he leaned forward and said in a loud whisper to Jean-Louis: "He's getting old, that's his trouble."

Abruptly the ancient mind switched and he asked: "You from the mainland? I'm told they've got a new bomb there, will kill a million people in one go. I heard about it. Ho, such slaughter!" He cackled, enjoying the thought; then he added urgently, seriously: "But there must be plenty of tobacco. There'll be plenty of tobacco, won't there?"

"Yes, there'll be plenty of tobacco," said Jean-Louis, seeing at last the value of the mad old man, too mad to be suspicious of reality, too mad to guard his tongue; and his brother, too apologetic to interfere. "Where do you live?" he asked.

"Just up there—a cabin in the trees, a hundred metres, that's all."

"I'd like to hear you talk about the war, old man," he said. "And I can tell you more about that bomb. How it kills—it's fantastic!"

The old man was hopping again with excitement. "Yes? Can it kill more than a million? All at once? Oh, what slaughter . . ."

"Tell you what," said Jean-Louis. "I'll just go back to the café and pick up some more cigarettes—a couple of hundred, maybe—and then perhaps I can bring them back to your cabin and we'll have a talk."

He looked questioningly at the saner brother. "All right,"

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the man said. "If you don't mind. And it'll please my brother. He's harmless really. It's just that he's still at Verdun all the time."

Jean-Louis hurried back to the café for cigarettes.

"Where's the girl," he asked the proprietress, "and my friend?"

She leered and jerked her head. "In the woods. Walking. Or doing something else for all I know."

For a moment Jean-Louis felt envious and frustrated. Then, as he stepped out towards the cabin of the old man from Verdun, he consoled himself with the thought of the girls he could have, and what he could do with them, when he had a million francs.

They walked in silence, an arm's length apart, and not even accidentally did their hands touch. When they reached a clearing where the woodcutters had been at work they sat and rested their backs against a log, and wondered how to bridge the gulf of too much intimacy too quickly.

At last the girl said: "Why have you come here?"

"You heard me say," Webb answered. "I am in the holiday camp business. To look around."

"I do not think that is true."

"No? Why not?"

"I don't know. It just does not strike me as true. You do not do the right things. And anyway, this place would be impossible, even I can see that."

He hesitated, and then said: "You are right, of course. It's Jean-Louis who is in the holiday business—or so I'm told. I've been hired to watch him, and then make a report to someone back in Marseilles. I don't much care if Jean-Louis knows the truth or not, it doesn't seem to me very important, but perhaps you'd better not say."

"You are not very efficient."

"Mmmh?"

"You are not watching him very hard now."

"Oh!" Webb laughed. "He can't go very far. I've taken the rotor arm out of the car. And ten minutes' talk tonight will tell me where he's been."

"You are not his friend, then?"

"Friend? I only met him on the boat coming over."

She said gravely: "He thinks he is your friend, that one."

Webb was vaguely uncomfortable at her solemn, too naive,

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questions. He stretched out and lit a cigarette and tried to change the subject.

"Are you sorry you told me ... what you did ... the other night?"

She seemed unembarrassed. "No. Now you know more of me in one day than any other man. And in five, six days you will be gone. It makes me feel ... sort of ... safe with you." She worked back to her questions: "But that is not really your business, spying on people?"

"No—that's just a week's 'business intelligence.' I don't really know what my business is, any more. I used to be manager in Algiers for a British firm of importers. But that finished when the French cleared out. I should really go back to London and see if the firm will give me a job somewhere else. But I don't know ..."

"And where is your wife?"

He had known she would ask this, but he was still surprised, and he tried to turn it away. "How did you know I was married?"

She answered, quite seriously: "I can always tell when a man has been married, and much in love with his wife. There is something about his manner with all other women. Perhaps I could see this even in Ajaccio, and that is why I talked to you. Your wife is in London?"

"No, she's dead."

There—the words were out now. It had been so quick, and he had not permitted himself time to think. Perhaps it was true that it hurt a little less every time you said it. Time may not heal, but repetition blunts.

The girl murmured something that Webb did not catch, and he found that he could go on. Calmly, quietly. Not too many details. Keep it unemotional.

"My wife was French, but she kept out of politics and we got through the troubles in Algiers without any particular bother. Then, at the very end, when the OAS was practically finished, a little gang of them kidnapped my wife off the street. I was at work, I did not know.

"They took her to an empty house and ... did things to her. She could not have told them anything, because she had nothing to tell. But they ... used her. She was very attractive. There were several of them, and in the course of this, she died.

"I had a friend in the Barbouzes—those were the French Government underground commandos who smashed the

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OAS . . . This friend tracked down these men, and found them, and they were all shot on the spot. With sub-machine guns. My wife was already dead, and I was not there."

There was a long silence and Webb felt drained, but not ashamed, as he had expected to be. The girl said: "I was right to know that I could talk to you, then."

"I suppose so." He sensed her withdrawing again, and for some reason he said: "I have not slept with another woman since then."

She did not seem to hear. Instead, she answered a question that he had not asked aloud. "Yes," she said, "if that had to happen, your wife was lucky to die. Never wish that she had lived."

"Of course I wish she had lived, every minute I wish she had lived. How can you say that!"

"No." She shook her head sadly. "That you say now. But if she had come back, after what happened . . . I had much less than your poor wife, but I am . . . soiled . . . for any other man. Do not wish her alive like that."

He gently turned her head towards him and said with complete sincerity, realising that he was learning even as he spoke: "No, Mariane. Not soiled. It is the men who do such things who are soiled. Not their victims."

She gave a half-smile that he could not interpret, and climbed to her feet to walk back up the hillside.

MATTEO walked, by the road, the whole twenty-five kilometres to Christiu and it was dusk when he arrived. He went straight into the café, but met no eye and said no word until he had drunk, in one draught, the full glass of ice-cold beer which he commanded with a gesture. Then he wiped his mouth, turned with his back to the counter and slowly surveyed the room. There were four or five men and one of them got up quickly, excused himself, and hurried out to tell the rest of the village that Matteo was here.

Matteo's shotgun was propped against the bar, and he looked down at it and then back to the men and asked quietly: "Well?"

Webb, sitting at a corner table and playing poker dice with himself to pass the time before dinner, observed with no comprehension. He raised an eyebrow at Mariane, who was polishing glasses behind the bar, and she shrugged.

"Well?" Matteo asked again.

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"He's not here now," one of the men answered. "But he'll be back. Soon."

"I'll wait," said Matteo, and sat heavily alongside the others.

"What will you do?" one asked.

"I'll wait," he said again.

"But when he comes, what will you do?"

Matteo turned on the other a look totally without expression.

"I shall see," he said.

The yellow light from an oil-lamp spilled out of the open wooden door of the shack, and shadows moved on the tall columns of the pines. Jean-Louis stood there a moment. Inside, one old man cackled as he fingered a heap of loose cigarettes, the empty packets crumpled beside them, and another old man watched him apologetically. "I won't forget," Jean-Louis called. "Blood and tobacco. Slaughter the Boches. Eh, you wicked old hero, you? *A demain.* We must talk some more."

"Yes, more," the old fool echoed. "More slaughter. More cigarettes. More, more!"

Jean-Louis raised a hand in farewell and made his way down towards the village, still chuckling to himself, well pleased with his evening's work and considering the cost of two hundred cigarettes a small price to pay.

He had established that Max Genovese's information and hunch had both been correct. Two strangers had indeed stayed in Christiu at the appropriate time. They had been "challenged" on the road, like all unwary visitors, by the old idiot, and had been amused by his talk of killing.

Jean-Louis could imagine the scene—the crazy old man cackling and hopping, and thumping his rifle stock on the ground; furious, screeching that none but he knew what slaughter really was, demanding who were they and how could they know. And the two OAS gunmen exchanging glances, amused, confident, possibly a little drunk; and deciding that there could be no harm in telling an aged lunatic miles from nowhere that the OAS, of which he had never heard, were specialists in death; laughing at his fury as they taunted him with the meaningless words; knowing that he would forget, as he had forgotten everything since Verdun—and not realising that the brother who stood behind him so silently and apologetically was quite, quite sane; and might remember.

But, even in his perpetual delirium, the old man had sensed

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that they were laughing at him, had mistrusted them, therefore; convinced himself they were Boches.

"So what did he do?" Jean-Louis had asked innocently, taking a cigarette from the heap.

"Played his war games as usual," said the younger brother. "Trailed around after them, spied on them, the usual nonsense."

In spite of his inner excitement, Jean-Louis had not pursued the matter that night. Tomorrow, he decided, he would come back with more cigarettes and get the old man to show him where he had shadowed the two strangers . . .

Jean-Louis' step was light as he strode happily into the café and paused a moment on the threshold, blinking his eyes in adjustment to the light. He was aware of something odd. The place was unusually crowded, but . . . Yes, that was it: the silence. Instead of the usual hubbub of conversation, there was utter silence but for the clatter of dice rolling gently on a corner table somewhere.

As he regained his vision, the faces became less of a blur, and they were all turned to him. Then suddenly one face from the crowd seemed to rush towards him. It was like trick photography in a film—the one face seemed to roar towards him like a train and then withdraw, and now it was static, ten feet from him, carved in walnut, and as impassive.

The old man Matteo stared at him now in reality as he had stared at him so often in nightmare. Matteo was seated at a table facing the door, and the men around him stood back so that there was nothing, nothing but space and fear and tension, between him and Jean-Louis.

Jean-Louis was shaking, and he wished he could sit so that it would not show. He must control himself; he must. Focus on something, anything. But not that face. Make your mind focus on something, and then you can think.

He wished he could remember some prayer, some talisman; but the only words that raced silently through his head were, stupidly, "Blood and tobacco, blood and tobacco, slaughter the Boches . . ." All he could hear, as the eyes rested on him like black stones, was the cackle of another old man: "Slaughter the Boches! A million of them. A million dead . . ."

That was it. Hold on to that. A million. But not a million dead . . . A million francs. A million francs. Enough to live for? Enough to die for? Enough to buy a man's courage? Enough, at least, to stop the head whirling, and to

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hear and to see through the moment's madness, and to know that the nightmare was now.

Finally someone in the crowd spoke. "And will you run away this time, little Calvoresi?" he asked.

Something was stuck in Jean-Louis' throat, and he found himself shaking his head—whether to clear it, or to answer, he did not know.

A hubbub of talk was released in the crowd, and from it two words kept breaking to the surface: "The Game... the Game..."

They were asking Matteo now: "It should be the Game, no?" and he shrugged and said: "It is all the same to me."

From his corner, Webb had heard the name Calvoresi, but he could not see Jean-Louis over the crowd. He asked a man near him what was happening. "Vendetta," the man said, without turning. "That coward ran away from vendetta three years ago. Now it has caught up with him. It always does."

The man had spoken without thinking. Now something occurred to him and he turned and stared at Webb. Then he shouted above the babble of voices: "Wait! There must be no strangers." Politely he added to Webb, as if asking a child to leave the room: "I am sorry. This is Corsican business."

But as Webb pushed himself to his feet, Jean-Louis glimpsed his face and called: "He is no stranger. He is my friend. He stays."

Suddenly Webb understood something. Jean-Louis was fighting his cowardice. Shaking and quaking with terror, but fighting it. And Webb was the anchor to which he clung. He would shame himself, as he had always done, but he had one small hope—that he could try not to shame his only "friend."

"That's right," Webb said, and pushed his way through the crowd. "I am his friend. I would like to stay."

Matteo did not look up. "It is all the same to me," he said again.

Webb still had the poker dice in his hand, and was unconsciously rubbing them in his palm with a dry clicking sound.

Jean-Louis stepped forward and sat down at the table opposite the old man. Somebody leaned forward. A hand blurred before his eyes; there was a thump; and the point of a knife was driven into the wooden table-top. It was a hunting knife, perhaps ten inches long, and two-thirds of it was blade. It quivered in the table, mid-way between Matteo and Jean-Louis.

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The violent movement shocked Webb, and he asked: "What is this game?"

Nobody answered until Jean-Louis looked up at him with the strained thread of a smile on his thin face, and said: "It is quite simple. A card is nominated as the card of the knife. Then someone turns up the cards on the table one by one. When the card of the knife appears, that is the signal for . . ."

He swallowed hard, and Webb looked at the dull steel blade between the two men, and understood.

He was still fiddling with the dice, and someone said: "There is no need for cards. We can use the stranger's dice."

For the first time, Webb realised that he was still holding them, and he opened his hand above the table and let them clatter on to its surface. There were five identical dice, and the six sides of each bore, in black and red and green and blue, the emblems of the nine of clubs, the ten of diamonds, and a jack, queen, king and ace.

With great deliberation, Matteo stretched out a brown hand and separated two of the dice from the rest. "Two are enough," he said.

A voice from the crowd asked: "Which is the card of the knife?"

And another said: "Let the girl choose," and Webb remembered that Mariane was still behind the bar at the back, and heard her answer with surprising clarity: "The queen." There was no hesitation, and he wondered briefly if she had witnessed this scene before.

"And who will throw the dice?"

Matteo spoke again: "Let his friend. It is all the same to me."

Webb realised that they were speaking of him. He started to protest. Then he looked down at the face of Jean-Louis and at the graven features of Matteo. Both were sitting very straight in their chairs, their hands, palm down, on the table edge before them. Matteo's looked heavy, carved, and were motionless. Jean-Louis', the fingernails black and bitten, were pressed hard against the wood, and as Webb watched the fingers slid, contracting, in towards the palms. Between the two men, the knife still swayed, very slightly.

Webb took a deep breath. "All right," he said.

He leaned forward and picked up the two dice.

The boy hurried up the steep slope in the dark, ducking

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round the boles of the great pines, brushing through the whispering fern.

Hours earlier, Georges Calvoresi had hastened home with his new puppy and smuggled it up to his bedroom. He would have liked to have stopped and played with the animal, but he dared not. He hugged it briefly against his chest, and whispered into the soft ear that it had better be a good dog until its master returned.

"I'm your master now," he said, "and I've got to go out, but I'll be back soon. Understand?"

The scrap of dog said nothing, and he made a little nest for it out of an old jersey which he deposited as far under his bed as he could reach. Near it he placed a large ashtray full of water and crumbled biscuit. Then, with a last glance back from the door, he dashed out, calling to his mother in the kitchen: "I'm off to play in the woods. *Au 'voir.*"

He knew he would be late back and that there would be trouble; but he knew, too, that he must get to Christiu to see the confrontation between Matteo and his brother, Jean-Louis.

Although the way through the woods was far shorter than the road, his thin legs were easily tired and he often halted to get his breath or to quench his thirst in one of the cascading streams. It was well dark when at last he saw the roadside wall of Christiu outlined against the sky above him, and as he panted up the slope, first the roofs of the houses and then the spilled light from the café guided him.

He scrambled over the wall and moved silently across the road. He was no longer tired, but gripped by an almost frightening excitement. Stacked on the *terrassé* were half a dozen shotguns, left there by some of the men who had come in from hunting. The café door was blocked by the bodies of men, their backs towards him. They were on tiptoe, straining to look over the heads of their fellows at something that was going on inside. There was a tense silence, and his small body wriggling and burrowing through the crowd did not distract it. He wormed his way around, found a table in a darker corner, and clambered up on it, looking down over the heads into the centre of the room.

He saw Jean-Louis, and Matteo, and the knife; and a stranger standing by them, his right hand raised and slowly moving.

"All right," said Webb, and shook the two dice. He swept his hand down close to the table-top, yet clear of the poised

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knife; withdrew quickly and let the dice roll. One stopped at the nine of clubs. The other clattered on, over the table edge, and fell to the floor. Jean-Louis started, and his hands leapt from the table.

"That does not count," someone said. "On the table, please, stranger."

Matteo had not moved. Jean-Louis breathed heavily and put his hands back in their poised, crab-like position. Webb swallowed and apologised. He was given back the dice, and he threw them again.

The black ace and the red king.

The tension was tangible as he scooped them up and threw again. What were the odds? he wondered. How long before the green queen *must* appear?

The nine of clubs, and the black ace.

Jean-Louis' eyes were flickering constantly from the dice to the knife and back again. Matteo was still unmoving, unyielding.

Webb's muscles ached. He threw again.

The blue jack.

The green queen.

There was the soft sound of breath being sucked in, of a shoe creaking. Jean-Louis' chair was pushed back. He lunged forward for the knife. Both his hands swept down towards the hilt.

He poised for an instant, trembling there, and in his vision, beyond the blade, were Matteo's hands still rigid on the table, as though nailed down. The old man was staring at him, not stirring a muscle.

Slowly, his hands still hovering over the knife, his body bent forward across the table, Jean-Louis raised his head. Their two faces were only inches apart. Matteo looked at him, with contempt. He was wood, stone, iron, everything that is cold and hard and of the same unflawed substance to its core. He looked with inflexible contempt into the eyes of Jean-Louis.

An uncontrollable shaking began in the younger man's arms. He straightened his back and dragged his eyes from the old man's as though he were tearing plaster from a wound. He turned his head wildly from side to side of the silent crowd.

"I won't do this," he said, his voice high. "I won't! This is vendetta . . . a matter of honour . . . between men . . ."

His voice trailed away, and someone laughed scornfully.

"This is vendetta," he cried out, "not a café entertainment! I will honour the vendetta, but in the right way."

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Someone laughed again, and suddenly he was furious. "I will! I mean it!"

He turned back to Matteo. "You and I are in vendetta," he said. "When next we meet, on the road or in the woods, when next we meet, one of us shall die." The formal words, the ritual of the challenge, filled his head, and he pushed violently through the crowd and disappeared through the door.

A long sigh, of many breaths exhaled, rustled in the room. Only Matteo did not move or speak.

At length he pushed back his chair and rose to his feet. He stared at the knife and the dice on the table; and raised his head and said to nobody in particular: "It makes no difference."

Men made a way for him as he went to fetch his shotgun from where it still leaned against the bar counter. Then he walked slowly out into the night.

WHY had Jean-Louis not seized the knife when he had the chance? Was it really because his pride, new-found, rebelled against making a public performance of death? Was

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it really because he had decided, at last, to honour the vendetta debt in the old way—two men, alone on a road, with guns? Or was it because he was still a coward; because his nerve had failed him yet again? Was he playing for time? And, if so, was it time to ambush? Or time to escape?

Men began to ask the questions as soon as Matteo had left the café. The boy Georges wondered, too. He felt bitterly shamed by his brother and, as he slipped quietly outside, an idea began to burn within him.

Mariane seemed contemptuous of the whole thing. "A charade," she sniffed, when Webb managed to speak to her as the orders came fast and she began serving drinks.

Webb himself was not sure, but he suspected that Jean-Louis had again been beaten by his fear.

Where was Jean-Louis now? In ambush on the road back to Christiu? Drinking himself into insensibility under a tree? Wherever he was, Webb felt sure that he would return; that he would have to come back and explain himself, and try to find himself again, in words, to a friend who was a stranger. That is, if he did not meet Matteo first.

Some of the men began to drift out. A shout came from the *terrasse* as one of the hunters left. "Hey! My shotgun! It's gone!"

Sure enough, where there had been six guns stacked by the wall, only five now were left.

Matteo trudged along the road that snaked between rocks and trees. Sometimes its surface was black, sometimes grey, and sometimes sudden silver as high-scudding clouds moved across the half-moon in the mountain winds. His shotgun swung from his right hand. He was relaxed, and untired, and fatalistic.

Vendetta was a way of life. He did not even waste a thought on wondering if Jean-Louis really was still a coward: this was immaterial. Now, the challenge had been spoken in public. Now, if the two men met, one must kill the other. That was the law of vendetta, and it did not matter if one of them was a coward or not: one might live and one must die.

His senses were alert, the senses of a man long tuned to the instincts of animals in the lonely pastures.

He walked on, unhurried. Here and there the roadside at his left hand was studded with huge boulders, ten and fifteen feet high.

At one such spot Matteo abruptly stopped. He stood rigid.

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He narrowed his eyes against the darkness, for the moon was now hiding.

He stood like an animal, feeling the air. Very gently, he supported the barrel of his shotgun with his left hand, and adjusted his grip with his right, and held the weapon across the front of his body, at chest height. He listened again for a moment and then, slower than previously, walked on.

Suddenly he sensed rather than heard a movement behind him. He jumped to the right, turning left and back as he moved, and bringing up his shotgun. A voice came, speaking very fast, from a boulder not ten paces from him.

"In the name of my dead brother . . ." it began to gabble.

There was something wrong, but there was no time to know what it was, for a figure slid into view beside the boulder at which Matteo's gun was already aimed. He squeezed one trigger, and the figure screamed, and was blasted, spun round and crumpled, and then Matteo knew what had been wrong with the voice.

He felt an emotion that he had not known since they had brought him the dead body of his son, killed in the brawl with the eldest Calvoresi brother.

"Dear God," he murmured. "Mother of mothers, forgive me."

He walked over and looked down at the shattered body of Georges Calvoresi, aged thirteen. The boy had been hit in the chest, and there was no life left in him. The gun that he had taken from outside the café lay on the ground a few feet away.

In a sudden rage, Matteo hurled it as far as he could into the trees.

He knelt by the boy, and gently touched his throat. No pulse. The silver crucifix still hung round the boy's neck. Matteo untied the cord, carefully, so as not to move the young dead head. He held the crucifix in both his hands, and closed his eyes and lowered his head, and knelt there for long enough. Then he fastened the cord round his own neck, and tucked the crucifix inside his shirt. Thus be the remembrance of what I have done.

He glanced round and saw his own gun where he had dropped it in the road. He fired the remaining barrel at the moon and then, with all his strength and great deliberation, he swung the gun by its stock and smashed the barrel again and again against the boulder.

He dropped the gun and picked up the boy and, cradling

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the light body against his chest, began to walk back towards Christiu.

IT was quiet in the kitchen behind the café. A candle burned. The dead body of the boy, covered by a sheet, lay on an old horsehair sofa. It was not a very big sofa, but it was big enough.

When Matteo brought the body back, he had explained what had happened, said he would arrange for it to be collected and taken home the next morning, and asked simply that it should not be left alone meantime. Webb had volunteered to keep the customary vigil. Of Jean-Louis there was no sign.

Webb's thoughts were in a turmoil. He was deeply shocked by the death of the boy, yet in a way this, too, was but another layer over the pain of his wife's death. The tragedy of others diminishes our own.

And Jean-Louis ... If Webb, a stranger, felt such a shocked dismay, what would Jean-Louis feel when he returned to see the body of his brother?

Webb realised that he had developed a tolerant affection for the skinny Corsican, coward and cheap crook that he was. How could you not feel *something* for one who was so aware of his own weaknesses, who degraded and punished himself more in his own heart than others ever could? He was a coward, yes—but always fighting it; always sitting in judgment on himself and executing his own sentence.

Was that the answer? To realise that you could not change the blows of fate; but to try, always to try, to change yourself so that you could meet them?

So where did that leave Thomas Webb, British, aged 38, 5 ft. 11 inches, no visible distinguishing marks except those of a man refusing to face up to life?

If Jean-Louis has tried, Webb told himself, at least I can try. And so? Recognise for a start that I've agreed to do a snivelling, sneaking, spying job for Genovese that a year ago I'd not have considered for a moment. I don't like the job and I'm not doing it properly anyway. Agreeing to do it in the first place was just another postponement of facing the facts. That at least I can fix. I can phone Genovese and report on what has happened up to now—that will earn the fee he advanced me; and quit. Then I'll tell Jean-Louis the truth (if he hasn't suspected it already). Then ...

It was always so easy up to a point. Then you had to look

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beyond it, over the edge. It had been the same with the girl in Ajaccio . . .

He rubbed his eyes. He was tired and the room was stuffy and already smelled of death. He walked up and down. But the movement did not dispel the thought which was answering his own question.

He had become in some way involved with Mariane and Jean-Louis. Being involved, he felt in some way responsible for them. Feeling responsible, he could not just walk out on them.

When you are involved, you are no longer alone. But you are no longer free.

Her voice came from a long way off, and it said: "Have some coffee. It will keep you awake."

He took the cup, blinking tired eyes and asked: "Finished?"

"Yes, everyone has gone. The *patronne* is in bed."

"And you?"

"I am not tired. Just . . . sick of everything."

In spite of her words her voice was weary, and he asked: "Sick?"

All at once she was intensely angry. A finger stabbed towards the white sheet on the black sofa, and she spat the words: "Sick! Yes, sick! Sick of your men's world. That is what it leads to, that! You and your codes and your laws and your rules. That dead child is your men's world. What's left of me is your men's world. What happened to your wife is your men's world. And you ask why I am sick of it all."

She leaned her head in her hands and said softly: "I'm sorry, but that is what I think."

"I've been sitting thinking, too. I got a little way. Not very far."

"You must go away," she said, without looking at him. "This island—it is death. It is nothing to do with you."

He gave a small laugh. "I was just thinking that it's not easy to go away, now I've got . . . involved."

"Involved! You are not involved. You are a foreigner. You have just . . . seen things that can happen. Why don't you get back down to the coast where you belong! Down to the holiday camps, and the tourists, and the nice clean girls in bathing costumes! Go back to your own world, and leave us to ours."

She began softly to cry, and he watched her weep the purging tears in silence.

At last she said: "I am sorry. That is why you must go."

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"Why?"

"Because I hate your man's world. And you are a man—and yet you are not like that, and you confuse me, and I do not know what to think.—It is better left alone."

"Listen, Mariane. Something drew us together in Ajaccio; something was there, even if we did not know it. Was it sex? No, let me go on. Was it just that I had not had a woman for a long time, and you simply wanted a protection from the man in the café?"

"Do you think that is what it was?"

"A little, but not all. It was something more... some parallel that we sensed between what happened to you and what happened to my wife, perhaps. Or something in the way you were running away from life, as I was. We were both... bruised... and we came together, and we found something in each other. That is all, but it is something. I don't know what it means, or where it leads, but I don't want to walk away from it now. Do you understand?"

She thought for a moment, and answered: "I do not know how you can talk like this, when you know what I am. But if you do..."

She shrugged and half-smiled. "You are a funny man. I even like you a little."

"That's good."

"So what do we do?"

"First, I will do what I must do. I have decided to phone the man who sent me here, and tell him I quit." He rose. "Is there a telephone?"

"In the bar. But it's three in the morning!"

"Well, as he would be the first to say, business is business."

Max Genovese was furious. "You can't do that to me," he roared down the telephone. "You have a job to do and I will not permit you to stop halfway. You have taken my money..." He controlled himself and continued in a reasonable tone: "Mr. Webb, listen. I trusted you on this little assignment. What's a few more days, eh?... Yes, vendetta is very hard, very sad, but I don't want to know all that stuff."

His voice became softer, but nastier. "Mr. Webb, it wouldn't be that you're double-crossing me? Getting together with that Jean-Louis? That would be very foolish, Mr. Webb, and very short-lived...

"Now Mr. Webb, if you go on like this, I'm going to have to come across to the island and sort out this little problem

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myself. That would be a great inconvenience to me. I would be very annoyed. Don't make me do that, Mr. Webb . . ."

Then his patience was gone. "You double-crossing pig! I'm coming for you. And you can tell your gutless friend the same goes for him, too!"

The telephone was slammed down and, in his quiet flat in Marseilles, Genovese stared down at it for a moment. "If there's one thing I can't stand, it's dishonesty," he muttered. "Damn his eyes! And an Englishman, too."

Then he bawled: "Chin-Chin!"

The Arab opened the door.

"We have work to do," said Genovese briskly. "We leave for Corsica in the morning, you and I. It's damned inconvenient, but it has to be done. We go in the quiet way—no need for the police to know we're there. I'll want a car on the other side."

"Shall we be away long?"

"What I have to do won't take long, no."

"So they've cheated you," the Arab whispered. "The scared one and the English."

And he was a little pleased that he had told Jean-Louis the truth about his mission after all.

Webb stood looking at the now-silent telephone. "I don't know what all the fuss is about," he said, walking through to Mariane. "He just lost his temper, went all berserk on me. Said he's coming over himself. Seems a hell of a lot of excitement over a little bit of business . . ."

He broke off as he noticed the line of the girl's eyes; he turned and saw Jean-Louis standing in the doorway. The little Corsican seemed to have become even smaller, and stood as though he were an empty suit pegged on a clothes-line. Webb moved towards him and said: "You know, then?"

The Corsican nodded. "A bunch of them coming away from here ran into me. Hours ago. I think they hit me. I've just been . . . I don't know . . . wandering about, since."

Webb now saw that Jean-Louis' lip was cut, an eye swollen. "He's in there—your brother."

"I suppose so."

Jean-Louis seemed to be answering the words without taking them in. He looked like the shell of a house that has had a hand-grenade tossed down its chimney: still standing, but gutted inside.

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He moved into the inner room and stared at the white sheet covering his brother.

"Listen, Jean-Louis," Webb began. "There's something you must understand..."

But the Corsican cut across his words and said in a flat voice: "I am so guilty. This death has smashed everything inside me, and only the guilt is left. No, let me say it. I am guilty because I was a coward when my brother Marc was shot. I am guilty because I was a coward last night and could not draw the knife from the table. I am guilty because you were my friend last night, and I have lied to you. And you have lied to me, my friend, haven't you? I heard you, before I came in just now, I heard you talking on the phone to that Genovese. I should have guessed—not that it matters any more. You see, we both work for Max Genovese."

"Not any more," said Webb. "If you listened, you know that I've quit."

"That was foolish. He will think we are double-crossing him together. He will come here."

"That's what he said."

"If he thinks we are double-crossing him, he will want to kill us," Jean-Louis went on in the same detached voice. "Oh, but I forgot. You don't know, do you?"

"Don't know what?"

"It doesn't matter any more. None of it matters. Except that my last brother is dead. Because of my cowardice. And I must atone. The money doesn't matter. Being afraid doesn't matter. I must do what has to be done."

"What money?"

The answer came as of no importance. "Oh, yes, you don't know. Genovese thinks there is money hidden in Christiu. A lot of money. He sent me here to check."

A score of questions rushed through Webb's brain, but he got no further than the first "But..." before the other went on in his dead intonation: "I must... confront... Matteo."

"But he'll kill you."

"Probably. It's funny. When it was a debt of honour, I couldn't do it. Now I'm beyond all those words. I'm just... guilty... lost... and I shall follow the rules of vendetta. That is what rules are for, my friend. When you are beyond being frightened, or being brave, when you don't care any more, the rules are there to cling on to. Now you had better go up and sleep. I shall stay here for a while. Then I, too, will sleep. Don't worry, I won't appear when they come to collect the

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body and take him home. There will be no more embarrassment from Jean-Louis."

Webb left him in the candlelight, as motionless as his dead brother.

THE graveyard was on the hillside above the village, probably two hundred feet higher than the road and reached by a sanded and beautifully kept path which wound and lengthened and made the climb less steep than it might have been.

Jean-Louis did not go by the path. He climbed through the trees to emerge higher than the graveyard.

From up here, it looked like an arena of dolls'-houses: these were the family tombs, each with its pointed roof and its wrought-iron gates. Little patches of colour among them marked the freshly-flowered graves of those who could not afford a mausoleum. And there, a dark shadow in all that sunlit colour, was the funeral party. He could see the black rectangle of the open grave, the shade cast by the heaped fresh earth, the black clothes of the mourners, the white of the priest's surplice. The whole village seemed to be present.

As he watched, he could see the movement of the priest's arms sprinkling the holy water on the coffin, the protective clustering around one figure a little apart from the rest: that would be his mother. No sound reached him up there, but he could hear the words in his head: *Que son âme, et les âmes de tous les fidèles défunts, reposent en paix par la miséricorde de Dieu* . . . His lips shaped the words silently—the same final prayer that he had heard at the burial of another brother, when he stood alone in his bright clothes among the black.

Whether he liked it or not, he was part of this thing that was being enacted below, and Jean-Louis found himself moving, slipping down through the trees. He did not want to, but he had to.

Faces were turning towards him, eyes and tongues pointing like fingers, but he was oblivious.

He moved among them, and through them, and then he was looking at his mother.

Neither spoke for long moments, and at last she said slowly, in a voice of gall and venom: "I . . . bury . . . you!"

"*Ma mère* . . ." he began.

"*Mère*!" She spat the word. "Your mother I was. But before God, you are not my son."

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The priest had taken her arm and was murmuring something about forgiveness.

"Forgive?" she demanded. "Let God forgive when he rots in Hell. I cannot."

She turned back to Jean-Louis and said: "You betrayed one brother and you killed another. Not Matteo—he did not kill my Georges. You killed him, you!"

She turned her back and moved off, and black suits and black dresses, and black hats and white faces, parted and flowed round Jean-Louis, and joined up again beyond him, like a dark stream dividing round a dead log that has jammed in its course.

"*Mon père.*"

The priest turned back to him.

"Father, will you help me? I must find Matteo. Where is he?"

"He has gone to shrive his sin and his guilt in the old, old way. He has gone to Vannina. It is almost Easter—had you forgotten? Matteo has gone to Vannina. To Le Catenacciu. To the Procession of the Penitent."

Now Jean-Louis understood.

He thanked the priest, and the old man said: "In the blood of the Penitent so many sins can be washed away. Had you forgotten?"

He left. Jean-Louis stood staring after. The mourners below were diminished again, black puppets, getting smaller as they neared the main road.

As he stared, a large car came along the road, fast. It slipped across his vision, in the direction of Christiu.

In the back of the car, sprawled and comfortable, the fat man glanced up from a ledger. His eyes flicked up at the cemetery and the black line of mourners descending from it. He snorted. "Look at that! Good land spent on dead bodies! Waste of good timber!"

Chin-Chin did not answer, but drove Max Genovese steadily on towards Christiu.

Webb heard the engine of a car, and went outside to meet it. He had not really believed that Genovese would come all the way from Marseilles to this remote village and it was Jean-Louis who still filled his mind as he hurried to the front of the empty café, thinking: Thank God, he's made it.

But it was not their small hired Renault: it was a bigger car,

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a Citroën ID. Out of it got Max Genovese, still holding his ledger and writing down a final total as he walked across the *terrasse.*

Then he shut the book, tucked away his ball-point pen and said to Webb as if they were already in the middle of a conversation: "Yes, it's a pity you don't know a good accountant for me. They're all either no good or too good, and either way you lose money."

He sat by a table, saying: "That's the trouble, isn't it? One just can't delegate. There simply aren't the good people about. You now, are a great disappointment, Mr. Webb. You might have had quite a career with me—but here you go letting me down on your first little job. Well, now then. Where is he? Where is your little friend?"

"At this moment, probably at his brother's funeral. If you came up from the coast you probably passed him, about fifteen miles down the road."

"Oh, that? Yes, I saw it. I suppose that's all this vendetta stuff? Well, too bad. People should be more careful. And do you already have the money?"

"I know nothing of your money," said Webb. "You won't believe this, but..."

"One minute."

Genovese stopped him and ran his eyes very thoroughly over Mariane, who had appeared and was asking what they wished to be served. Genovese ordered two *pastis* for them, nothing for Chin-Chin, and watched her as she prepared and brought the drinks.

"Water, please," he commanded.

As she leaned by him, her bosom inches from his face, he said: "You're wasted here, my girl. How much do they pay you?"

"Just my keep."

Webb knew that Genovese was watching him, not the girl as they spoke, and he kept his eyes firmly on his glass.

"You could do better than that, a lot better. I'll look in on my way through next time. Maybe I'll have something for you," Genovese told her and slapped her rump to send her on her way.

They were alone again but for the Arab standing silently behind Webb's chair.

"All right, Mr. Webb. You were going to tell me something that I won't believe—and you're quite right: I won't believe it. Well?"

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"I know nothing of any money," Webb repeated, earnestly. "It's just that I'm sick of playing half-cock spy for you. So I quit. You want Jean-Louis watched, you watch him yourself. I've told you all I know. I've had enough, and I quit."

"And that's all?"

"That's all."

Genovese pushed himself back and rocked on the rear legs of his chair. "I'm surprised at you, Mr. Webb," he said thoughtfully. "I thought you of all people would refuse to touch OAS money. Now what would change your mind? Perhaps—" with a nod to the interior of the café—"perhaps you have found someone to distract you from thoughts of what the OAS once stood for?"

But Webb did not hear the last few words. In his brief reference to the hidden money, Jean-Louis had not mentioned its source. Webb was genuinely surprised at the news that OAS loot had been the secret reason for the mission, and this showed in his voice.

"Of course I wouldn't touch OAS money," he said.

Genovese seemed almost amused. "Naturally," he said softly. "The one thing I did not think of. I *knew* you wouldn't touch OAS money—and I was right. But the one thing that never occurred to me was that you might not *know* it was OAS money."

He chuckled. "What did Jean-Louis tell you, I wonder? That it was part of Rommel's treasure? Or did you just think people left sums of a million francs lying around Corsica for anyone to pick up?"

"A *million*?"

Genovese's voice hardened. "Now don't let's go on playing, Mr. Webb. Where is it?"

"I'm sorry, but I've no idea," said Webb.

Genovese's eyes had been scanning the empty chairs around them. The whole place seemed deserted at this sleepy hour of mid-afternoon. "Oh well," he said briskly, and nodded to the Arab.

Webb's hair was suddenly seized and his head dragged back so that his whole body arched in agony and his throat was taut and exposed. "I'll cut your throat as soon as look at you," the fat man said quietly. "Now—where is that money?"

Webb strained against the tearing at his scalp. Involuntary tears were smarting his eyes. His collar choked him.

"All right. Hurt him," Genovese said.

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The Arab brought up his other hand and jabbed two fingers, stiff and hard, down towards Webb's eyes. A scream came from inside the café. Mariane ran out, gasping: "No! Don't do that! Stop it! Please. Please..."

Webb barely heard her. He was choking, and his eyes were like cinders. Red. And hot. More than hot. Aflame.

He realised that the grip had gone from his hair and he leaned forward, pressing his chin into his chest, clenching his hands and his eyes, and fighting not to cry out through the searing scarlet agony that was splitting his head. At last he was able to raise his head and to see a little through a red and watery mist. Genovese first swam into focus, sitting back easily in his chair as if presiding at a board meeting. "Well?" he asked, in a very reasonable voice.

Webb pressed his hands hard on the table and pushed himself to his feet. Still holding on to the table for support, he moved his head a few painful inches and saw Mariane, an arm twisted behind her back and held by the Arab.

"Well?" The question came again.

"Tell that scum to let go of the girl."

"Don't worry," Genovese said soothingly. "He's not hurting her. He never hurts unless I tell him to. Then, of course, he does. Don't you, Chin-Chin?" The Arab grinned, and raised Mariane's twisted arm a fraction, and she stayed silent.

Genovese spoke again. "The little lady's concern for your welfare just now reminded me that I was clearly right when I surmised that you had found something to distract you here in Corsica. Hmmmh? Well, there's no need to answer. It's quite obvious: look at her face. In that case, Mr. Webb, since we already know from Algiers that you are rather sensitive to what happens to the women in your life..."

"You bastard," said Webb. "I'll kill you."

"No you won't, Mr. Webb," Genovese went on smoothly, "because in my right hand, under the table, I have an automatic pistol, and it would take very little for me to blow a hole in your stomach. You will tell me where that money is—now, immediately—or we will inflict pain on your girlfriend here, in a most thorough and efficient manner, until you do. Well, Mr. Webb?"

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"A Life to Lose" will be concluded in next month's Argosy. This serial version has been condensed from the novel of the same title, to be published by W. H. Allen on March 7.

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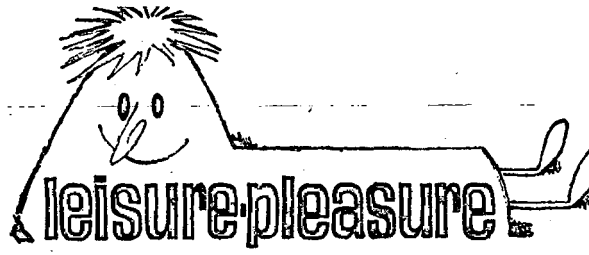

in which we take a look at new wines, new books and new cars

IT was the owner of a vineyard in the Médoc who made the point that wine-drinkers in Britain were, in one way, the most fortunate in the world—in that they had a wider choice of wines than could be found anywhere else. One has only to look at the shelves of a good wine store to see the truth of this statement. And almost every week new wines are appearing on the British market, and most of them at reasonable prices.

Among the latest arrivals is Cap Bon, a robust, red wine of fine deep colour from Tunisia. This is the first Tunisian wine to come to Britain under its own name. Twenty-two years ago the conquering British and American armies in North Africa got to know it well, and some may remember the Djebel-Djelloud vineyards from which this wine comes. Cap Bon has a high alcoholic content and goes well with such dishes as jugged hare and Irish stew. It costs 9s. 11d. per bottle and is available through Morgan Furze and Fosters shops.

Another and quite different new arrival is Santola, from the North of Portugal. It is what is known as a *Vinho Verde*, a green wine: it is only a year or so old when ready to drink, and does not improve with age. The vines from which its grapes are taken are trained up trees to shelter them from the hot sun, or grown up stakes in the shade. The grapes, though completely ripe, are green when picked. Santola is made by the Messias concern in the Bairrada, one of the most beautiful and least known regions of Portugal. They make,

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as well, a rosé which is quite new to the British market—the pleasant Rosé Tojal. Santola is a medium-dry wine with a slight natural sparkle which it acquires in the fermentation process, and should be well chilled. The green tint is definitely in it. It costs 12s. per bottle.

Rumania is one of the East European countries that is making a big effort to introduce its wines to the British market. Actually, there were vineyards in the country even before the Romans got there in 101 B.C., the most famous of which are Tirnave, Alba Ivlia, Aiud and Bistrita. There are now nine Rumanian wines on the British market, all priced at 10s. per bottle. Those most likely to find favour with the British palate are the full-bodied fruity Cabernet, the dry red Kadarka, and the light, white, fully-flavoured Tirnave Perla. Ottonel is an interesting sweet, but not too sweet, dessert wine with a muscat flavour. From Bulgaria come the admirable red and white Rila wines, which are good value for money at 15s., especially the Kadarka.

Gorringe's in Buckingham Palace Road, S.W.1, have made a special effort to get Bulgarian wines better known.

Swiss wines are fast building up a reputation for themselves in the British market.

Those interested in something special should look for the 1962 Orsat Martigny, Malvoisie Haute de Cry, which has a splendid golden colour and is full of character. From the Valais region, it is shipped by J. S. Woolley and Co. Ltd. and costs 21s. 6d. per bottle.

Dole de Sion, the only red wine of the Valais, is another to remember, costing about 14s. 6d. So are the dry white Neuchatel wines, which have a natural sparkle, and the white Fendant de Sion, which goes well with fish. They cost about 12s. per bottle.

Another fairly new arrival, not to be overlooked, is the Cyprus dry and white Monte Cristo table wine at 8s. 3d. per bottle.

Finally, two champagnes.

At his Soho Wine Market at 3, Greek Street, Soho, London, Mr. Jack Leroy sells his own brand of champagne, Duc de Milroi, at 22s. 6d. per bottle—which is excellent value for money—or 47s. for magnums. And, for a very special occasion, buy a bottle of the Mercier Champagne Réserve de l'Empereur, Brut, 1959. The elegant bottle, which should be kept and used as a decanter, will be a reminder of a remarkable wine.

John Baker White

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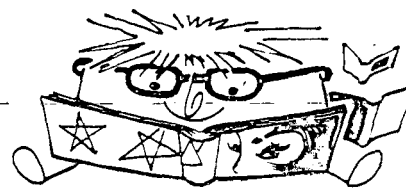
bookshelf



WITH his first novel, "Other Voices, Other Rooms," Truman Capote established himself as an international literary success. Now, nine books later, with the publishing of *In Cold Blood,* Capote is staking his reputation on a new literary form: the non-fiction novel.

In 1959, in a small lazy Kansas town, four members of the Clutter family were brutally murdered. Five years later, two men were hanged for the crime. The story completely absorbed Capote, and *In Cold Blood* is the story of the lives and deaths of these six people involved in the murder. Brilliantly told, it has all the excitement of the best thrillers—plus an exacting, almost case-history detail of each character with the Capote genius weaving truth and fiction together.

(Hamish Hamilton, 25s.)

John Bingham's *Fragment of Fear* is just as chilling as the well-chosen title implies.

An Englishwoman, old but still elegant, is found strangled in the courtyard of an empty house in Pompeii. The motive is not robbery, for she is still wearing her fabulous jewellery.

A fellow guest at her hotel, who writes detective novels, is naturally interested, but finds even his tentative inquiries met with hostile obstruction. And this mounts to active violence when he returns to England, by which time the reader finds himself personally involved in the ever-increasing sense of fear and terror. (Gollancz, 18s.)

Constantine FitzGibbon pays a fine tribute to friendship in his *Life of Dylan Thomas.* This is a sober, compassionate portrait which sees the dead poet not as a drunkard and womaniser, but as a man possessed of great gifts. (Dent, 42s.)

Now in paperback, there is a very different sort of picture of the same man in John Malcolm Brinnin's *Dylan Thomas in America.*

If for no other reason, it is interesting to read both to see just how differently the two authors saw the poet. (Dent, 7s. 6d.)

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Rudyard Kipling To Rider Haggard is a good book for your list on two counts: this collection of letters records a unique friendship between two giants, and it is all skilfully joined together with anecdotes and comment by the editor, Morton Cohen. But also the book will send you hurrying back to re-reading with fresh excitement Haggard's "She" and "Child of Storm," as well as some of Kipling's grand poetry, such as "Recessional."

What a comfortable comradeship these two men shared! When Haggard, knighted and world-famous, reached the age of fifty-five, he began writing his autobiography, to be kept unread and unpublished until after his death. In it, he refers often to Kipling:

> "Among my pleasantest recollections during the last few years are those of my visits to the Kiplings, and the one they paid me here, during which we discussed everything in heaven above and earth beneath. It is, I think, good for a man of rather solitary habits now and again to have the opportunity of familiar converse with a brilliant and creative mind. Also we do not fidget each other. Thus only last year Kipling informed me that he could work as well when I was sitting in the room as though he were alone, whereas generally the presence of another person while he was writing would drive him almost mad. He added that he supposed the explanation to be that we were both of a trade, and I dare say he is right. I imagine, however, that sympathy has much to do with the matter.
>
> Of late years Kipling has been much attacked, a fate with which I was once familiar, since at one time or the other it overtakes the majority of those who have met with any measure of literary, or indeed of any other success... No man is continually at his best, and the writer of 'Recessional' and other noble and beautiful things should be spared these scourgings."

This is the best sort of biography, for Professor Cohen shows us not so much the public faces of these two outstanding men, but what they were like at home. (Hutchinson, 42s.)

John Creasy, that man of a million aliases, has found time to edit an excellent crime anthology, *The 6th Bedside Book*, containing such favourite authors as Michael Gilbert, Roy Vickers and old-timers like Edgar Wallace. Worth-while choice. (Cassell, 16s.)

Jan Dehane

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man about cars

SINGER CHAMOIS MARK 2

TWO years' steady development work and advanced design have made the Singer Chamois Mark 2 a tough contender in the small car luxury stakes. The immediate impression, once inside the Chamois, is that of quality and comfort. By and large, the first impression holds good. Using the Hillman Imp body shell and mechanics, the Singer Chamois adds its own refinements in the shape of polished wood, better seating, more instrumentation, additional sound-damping and SP41 tyres on ½ inch wider wheels.

Easy to start and fairly quick to warm up, the Chamois soon proves itself a willing performer. The small, rear-mounted engine runs smoothly without fuss, and delivers quite a punch for its 875 c.c. (0-50 m.p.h. in 15 seconds), with a top speed of 80 m.p.h. At the same time it returns a nice economical 38 m.p.g., increasing to 44 m.p.g. on long runs.

There is no doubt that the rather wider Dunlop SP41 tyres do give the Chamois the edge over the Imp. The steering is even more precise, and already excellent handling becomes noticeably improved. Wet roads seem to make little difference to the Chamois' cornering ability. Nevertheless, it is not all gain. At low speeds on uneven and bumpy surfaces the ride can be a little harsh, and strong winds still tend to affect stability.

The seats are comfortable and well shaped to hold their occupants on corners, though they are a little short under the thighs. Back seating, too, is improved over the earlier model, with more shaping than before. The driving position is good, the seats having a fair range of fore and aft adjustment which can be doubled with a little spanner work. All the controls are almost at finger-tip distance and are neatly and sensibly laid out. The only exception is that some of the heater controls are difficult to reach when one is buckled into a safety belt. The gearbox deserves high praise, the change being light, crisp and faultless. The heater itself is extremely good, providing heat very quickly after a cold start—once the engine is thoroughly warm it supplies enough heat for a Zulu in

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Lapland! It is a pity, therefore, there is no provision for cooling air to the face. The swivelling quarter lights tend to allow the cool air to circulate at too low a level.

The Chamois has lots of room for the odds and ends that clutter up a car, with a lockable glove compartment shelf under the dash, and bins on each door and at the sides of the rear seat. There is a small luggage compartment in the bonnet, mainly suitable for soft luggage. With a wall behind the rear seat, additional space can be made by folding the rear seat forward. This makes a good-sized flat platform lined with rubber. The complete rear window folds up for easy access, and there are rubber strips on the bonnet cover. With a good lock—27 feet 6 inches turning circle—and all corners clearly visible from the driving seat, the Chamois is an excellent town or shopping car.

FIAT 850

By comparison, the Fiat 850 seems rather utilitarian. But a brief acquaintance soon dispels this feeling, leaving one pleased with the practical, hard-wearing rubber flooring and sensible, uncluttered layout. Equally, its pert performance leaves one wondering whether it was the lively Fiat or the lively Italian driver that came first.

The smooth engine always proved easy to start and was quick to warm up. Like the Singer's, the heater was effective almost immediately. Top speed and acceleration figures are a fraction lower than the Singer's, 76 m.p.h. and 0-50 miles in 16 seconds. But petrol consumption is a little better—40 to 45 m.p.g. on a long run.

The Fiat 850 encourages one to drive briskly, so that average speeds compare favourably with its slightly faster rival. The seats are comfortable and the backs are adjustable for rake. Rear seat room is a little less across the width. Handling is good but, like the Singer, can be adversely affected by strong side winds.

A wonderfully practical car, with no useless frills, the 850 should appeal to a wide range of people. I found that it was a boon in the country because no-one had to worry about muddy boots and still muddier dogs.

It is a little more difficult to load with shopping than the Singer, but its compact dimensions and square ends make parking quite easy. Altogether the 850 is tremendous value in its home market and very good value over here at £550.

Keith Fletcher

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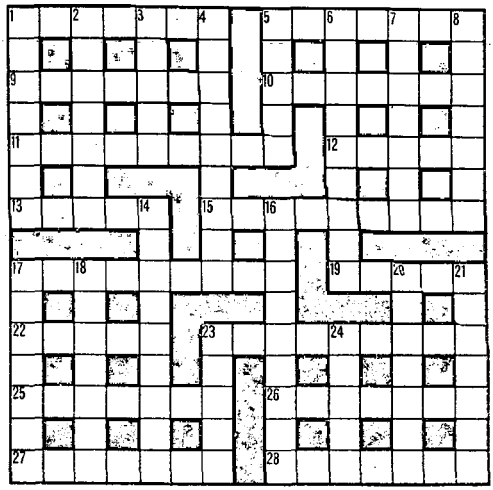
ARGOSY CROSSWORD

Solution next month



ACROSS

1 "Our —— is a garden" (Kipling) (7).

5 Circus performer could hold his drink (7).

9 On bare spots put nothing, see? (7).

10 Many hemmed in were cowering (7).

11 He's in The Bull—full of knowledge! (9).

12 No chicken, this warrior (5).

13 "Sleep is —— to the labouring man" (Bunyan) (5).

15 He'd dared 'n' got caught in the act (3-6).

17 A cocktail in New York (9).

19 Repealed law too rigorous? (5).

22 Quiet on the mat, showing indifference (5).

23 This guardsman's no vegetarian! (9).

25 Ale about and a keg damaged! (7).

26 Early when nurse is organised (7).

27 Has cash in hand? (7).

28 Sceptre at sea? (7).

DOWN

1 Four, with the press (7).

2 Cheese it, Switzer! (7).

3 Ring for engagements? (5).

4 A sandy renegade? No, a good soldier (6, 3).

5 Checking for parasites? (5).

6 Leading couple can get spliced! (4, 5).

7 Pull girl up for being a slowcoach (7).

8 The Russian leader is fair! (7).

14 It works come joy or grief (4, 5).

16 Meal laid — what service! (6, 3).

17 Little bundles of energy! (7).

18 Ran back with speed to tell story (7).

20 Sitting on a step? (7).

21 Water rushing down hill cleft (7).

23 Tragic king finally dim-sighted (5).

24 Tiredness from doing nothing! (5).

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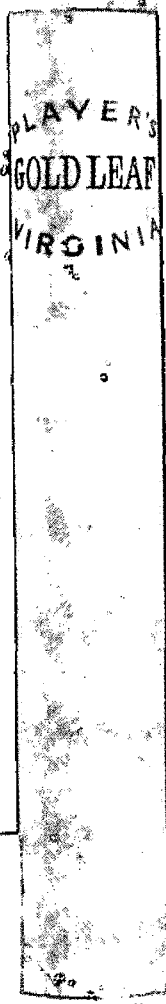
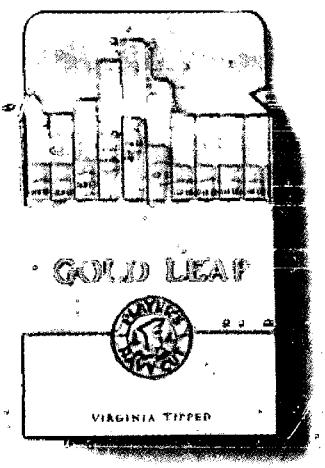


One of the great cigarettes



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